

Tree planting on tap today

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By KAY SEDGMER, Times Leader Staff Writer

CADIZ - Oxford Mining Co., LLC, has partnered with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and Office of Surface Mining and continues a program which benefit's the environment and wildlife.

Today, numerous participants will conduct a tree-planting project in the Jockey Hollow area in celebration of Arbor Day.

Continuing its participation in a tree-planting project which began a few years ago, the reclaimed Oxford Mining site will continue to use the Forestry Reclamation Approach to plant American Chestnuts.

To implement the FRA, soil is hauled to the site in end-dump truck and is placed in close piles that range from five to eight feet in height. The piles are strewn with stumps, roots and other organic material which creates a soil that is conducive for tree growth. The piles are then hand planted with either seedling or nuts.

Because of the success of last year's planting, Oxford Mining Co. has been nominated for the 2008 Excellence in Reforestation Regional Award for the project at

Jockey Hollow West which is one of the first mines sites in Ohio to use the FRA method. The site, operated by Oxford Mining, is located in Moorefield Township in Harrison County. The State of Ohio is the surface owner of the mine site. It is managed by ODNR's Division of Wildlife.

The area was strip-mined about 50 years ago and left about 10,000 feet of exposed highwall, ungraded spoil piles, barren areas, and numerous water-filled pit impoundments along the base of the existing highway.

That pre-law mining of the no. 9 coal occurred above the existing no. 8 coal's highwall and resulted in a relatively flat ridge top with exposed toxics, coal cleanings and underclay. The oxidation of exposed materials in the highwalls and water impoundments impacted both the surface and ground water in the area. The vegetation onsite was a combination of early successional and second growth hardwoods and low-quality grasses and fescue.

Topsoil and subsoil were absent from the site as a result of the pre-law mining. Eventually, Oxford Mining began to work with the property owner and regulatory agencies to

fully implement the five steps of the Forestry Reclamation Approach (FRA) exemplify the mission of the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative (ARRI).

The five-step program includes creating a suitable rooting medium for tree growth, using loose topsoil and topsoil substitutes, use of native and non-competitive ground covers compatible with tree growth, planting at least two types of trees, and the use of proper tree planting techniques.

In FRA has been highly effective in accelerating the return of the Jockey Hollow Mine site to a high-value hardwood forest.

In 2008, Marshall Case, the president of the American Chestnut Foundation, stated that the site was "the largest planting of American Chestnut on mine land in the eastern United States."

The survival rate of the seedlings planted in 2008 are estimated to be between 80 and 90 percent. The seeds survival rate was 76 percent. The over survival rate is exceptional as the area experience mild drought conditions in the latter third of the growing season.

Students and researchers for Ohio University monitor the survival of the seedlings. In October, two tours were conducted to show the results of the project. At that time, Ohio Mineland Partnership and OSM took advantage of the opportunity to view the progressive technique.

In addition, the American Chestnut Foundation used the site to help reestablish the American Chestnut in the Appalachian Region. The non-compacted soils, its low pH and its moisture retention ability makes the site desirable for tree planting.

In addition to the Chestnuts, other hardwoods such as oaks, maples, poplars and early successional trees for wildlife have been planted on the site. Some native volunteer species have also made their homes at Jockey Hollow including sassafras, cottonwood, red maple and elm.

A spokesman from Oxford Mining said the company is proud to participate in the program. Hopes are that in 15 years, when the chestnuts have matured enough to produce nuts, the area will help in the reintroduction and the reforestation of the trees to its once prominent status in the forests of the northeastern United States.

Also participating in the planting in the past have been AEP, Denoon Lumber, and Ohio Caterpillar. This years planting will consist of another 1,080 hybrid American Chestnuts and 70,000 other hardwoods.

Oxford Mining is based in Coshocton operating mines in Harrison and Belmont counties.

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