

Eliminating our carbon footprint one tree at a time

by Jessica Vierling

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On Friday March 27, The Appalachian Coal Country Watershed Team (ACCWT) proudly partnered with the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative (ARRI) and Patriot Coal to successfully host a tree planting event.

Thirty-three community volunteers attended the event to plant 3,650 hardwood trees of several native tree species on a 4-acre plot of previously mined land just outside of Prenter.

The goal was to enhance a reclaimed mine site through the supplemental planting of native hardwood species to promote forestland and wildlife habitat of the area and organizers believe this effort is helping to influence the way reclamation progresses.

Approximately 8 volunteers from Patriot Coal teamed up with 12 volunteers from the ACCWT, and six volunteers from the Citizens Conservation Corps of West Virginia. Also volunteering their time to plant trees were six National Park Service employees and one American Chestnut Foundation employee.

The trees were donated this year by Patriot Coal, who purchased 3,000 hardwood seedlings and the American Chestnut Foundation donated 50 American Chestnuts. ArborGen also contributing 600 hardwood seedlings.

Patriot Coal also donated the land on which the trees were planted in their efforts at reclaiming the land post mining use. Financial support was given by Kroger, Harper Road Beckley, Paul Hutchinson and City National Bank

“The ACCWT is an organization built on partnerships. Today is an example of successful

partnership building; Volunteer groups, state and federal agencies, and industry leaders joined together for this exciting initiative, without them, this wouldn't be possible," April Trent, ACCWT Program Coordinator and organizer of the tree planting event, said.

The ACCWT is a coalition of change-minded grassroots-level watershed improvement groups determined to repair the environmental degradation left from historic coal mining while creating economic stability needed in our rural communities. They are based in Beckley and throughout an eight state Appalachian region (PA, OH, MD, VA, WV, KY, TN, AL).

The Team is supported by an innovative partnership between AmeriCorps VISTA and the Office of Surface Mining. Reflecting the needs and the determination of the communities they serve, the ACCWT currently has 36 OSM/VISTAs in the field.

2009 is the first year that the ACCWT has partnered with ARRI. ARRI is a cooperative effort by the States of the Appalachian Region and the U.S. Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement to encourage restoration of high quality forests on reclaimed mined lands in the eastern USA.

Together, the ACCWT and ARRI are hosting ten volunteer oriented tree-planting events throughout the ACCWT's eight state region.

This joint effort strives to improve watersheds through the reforestation of former mine sites reclaimed with a grassland reclamation approach.

More than 3 million Appalachian residents live within a mile of an Abandoned Mine Land site. Through community involvement and volunteerism, these ten successful projects are coming to fruition.

This partnership is successfully enhancing reclaimed mine sites through the supplemental planting of native hardwood species to promote healthy forest habitats, an effort that is helping to influence the way reclamation progresses in the future.

To date, these projects have planted over 15,000 native hardwood trees on approximately 32 acres of mined lands.

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