

Welcome **GUEST**



MENU

[JOBS](#)

[CLASSIFIEDS](#)

[REAL ESTATE](#)

[CARS](#)

[TV WEEKLY](#)

[CONTESTS](#)

[SUBSCRIBE](#)

Charleston Gazette-Mail



Light Rain Fog/Mist 53.0 °F

[HOME](#)

[NEWS](#)

[BUSINESS](#)

[OPINION](#)

[SPORTS](#)

[LIFE](#)

[A&E](#)

[OUTDOORS](#)

[BLOGS](#)

[OBITUARIES](#)

[MULTIMEDIA](#)

[WEATHER](#)



CLICK NOW TO LEARN ABOUT SCHOOL CLOSINGS OR DELAYS.

Evan Hansen, Jennifer Newland: Environmental restoration creates jobs, grows WV

By Evan Hansen and Jennifer Newland

February 18, 2017



3 Signs of a Fatty Liver Wa



 Copy Link

Night Reading

Adjust Text Size

A A A



With West Virginia's budget deficit in the hundreds of millions of dollars each year and jobs so scarce, new economic development approaches are needed. A strategic partnership between Downstream Strategies and the Canaan Valley Institute

offers an approach that links environmental restoration with economic development.

We work with partners to build on each community's strengths, develop action plans and implement on-the-ground projects that clean up pollution and set the stage for new economic development.

Our work is part of a growing, statewide restoration industry that transforms liabilities into assets.

Restoration projects employ local people, diversify the state's economy, support other economic sectors and improve our quality of life.

Brownfields are examples of liabilities found in many West Virginia communities. They are former industrial or commercial sites where future use is hindered by real or perceived environmental contamination. They sit unoccupied, a source of blight.

Tapping into federal funds allows us to assess and clean up contamination so that new businesses will move in. In Thomas, for example, we have assessed six sites across the town, including several dilapidated buildings, and we are working to assess and revitalize the town's Riverfront Park, which straddles the North Fork of the Blackwater River in the historic downtown business district.



Some of the crumbling old buildings have already been removed or are now being renovated, complementing other revitalization efforts and improving safety and attractiveness of the downtown. Once the project is completed, the Riverfront Park will be fully developed with trails and a new pedestrian bridge connecting the downtown to trailhead showers and bathrooms, a fishing pier, sculpture gardens, and an outdoor amphitheater.

Other liabilities include streams polluted by past coal mining. A Downstream Strategies study calculated the economic benefits of remediating this pollution in the North Branch of the Potomac along the West Virginia/Maryland border. Decades ago, this river was dead. Today, acid mine drainage treatment has restored native trout and bass populations, and anglers and boaters spend \$2.1 million per year in the area. This spending cycles through the local economy, creating a \$3 million economic impact and dozens of jobs.

Restoration projects bring investment to rural communities. The Southern West Virginia Mitigation Bank includes three sites in Logan and McDowell counties totaling nearly 10,000 acres. These projects restored steep, headwater streams across old gas well pads, mine benches and valley fills, and planted native vegetation along streambanks to restore several watersheds. Unwanted and poorly constructed forest roads were eliminated to reduce erosion and allow rainwater and snowmelt to filter into the soil to feed streams during drier periods.

Two of the restored sites are now leased by the state Division of Natural Resources as wildlife management areas and are used by residents and visitors in a region where public land is scarce. One site also hosts the first of the state's re-introduced elk population, which is a real asset for West Virginia. This restoration project cycled tens of millions of dollars in private spending through the local economy and employed local engineering firms and heavy equipment operators.

In Berkeley County, we repaired eroding streambanks, protecting rural homeowners from further loss of their property during floods, while also reducing pollution. Reworking these streambanks into vibrant habitat for native songbirds and a corridor for other wildlife also reduced excess sediment downstream.

Landowners and the community as a whole benefit from this restoration work.

Transforming liabilities into assets takes creativity, technical experience and skilled labor — traits that West Virginia workers possess. Restoration projects also develop new skills that can be applied in other industries.

While restoration work requires investments from private entities and state and federal agencies, these investments provide solid returns. As state and local leaders make decisions about how to create jobs and diversify the economy, restoration projects like these must be an important part of the discussion.

Downstream Strategies and the Canaan Valley Institute are committed to growing the restoration industry as part of the state's economic development strategy. We will continue to put our experience and networks to work to transform community liabilities into assets that work for residents and businesses across West Virginia.

Evan Hansen is president of Downstream Strategies, an environmental consulting company in Morgantown and Alderson. Jennifer Newland is executive director of the Canaan Valley Institute, a nonprofit organization in Davis.