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1 / 1 A digitally enhanced rendering of what a Norton Riverwalk/Tipple Park project might look like.

Courtesy Appalachian Voices



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Appalachian Voices unveils RECLAIM wish list

[STEPHEN IGO \(/AUTHORS?USER=STEPHEN%20IGO\)](#) • NOV 1, 2016 AT 10:30 PM

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WISE – It literally requires an act of Congress, but three Southwest Virginia groups have collaborated to produce a wish list of 14 projects to tap into a proposed \$1 billion stream of federal revenue to help revitalize economically distressed communities of coal producing areas.



On Tuesday, Adam Wells of Appalachian Voices (adam@appvoices.org), Gerald Collins of Coal Mining Engineering Services LLC (gerald1951@comcast.net), and Evan Fedorko of Downstream Strategies (efedorko@downstreamstrategies.com) joined in a webinar press conference to unveil their year-long collaborative study of potential mine sites to be reclaimed for economic development purposes.

(For the full report, see Healing Our Land, Growing Our Future: Innovative Mine Reclamation in Southwest Virginia: <http://appvoices.org/new-economy/healing-our-land/>).

Revitalizing the Economy of Coal Communities by Leveraging Local Activities and Investing More (dubbed the RECLAIM Act, H.R. 4456) was introduced in February by Rep. Hal Rogers, R-Ky., and is co-sponsored by a number of other coal producing state legislators, including Rep. Morgan Griffith, R-Salem. The bill was assigned to the House Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources with no further action since.

If enacted, the bill would accelerate \$1 billion in federal Abandoned Mine Land (AML) funds over a five year period to reclaim and repurpose such sites for diverse economic development projects. The report collaborators favor renewable energy, agriculture and forestry, recreation and ecotourism, and/or standard commercial/industrial development projects.

Appalachian Voices said the bill could provide \$30 million to Virginia for such projects. The report unveiled Tuesday identifies 14 sites in Southwest Virginia the collaborators assert would be prime candidates, including locations in Scott, Wise and Lee counties.

They include Devil's Fork in Scott County (with its associated Devil's Fork Loop Trail and Devil's Bathtub attractions); Norton Riverwalk/Tipple Hill Park project in Norton; the Norton Cloverleaf project in Norton; Lonesome Pine Airport solar project near the town of Wise; the Tom's Creek area near Coeburn; remediation of the Glamorgan Development Site also near Wise; the Route 606 potential solar project site just south of St. Charles in Lee County; Puckett's Creek in Lee County; and remaining locations in the four other coal producing counties of Virginia.

"The communities throughout our coalfield counties, from Pennington Gap in Lee County to Pocahontas in Tazewell County, have been devastated by the loss of jobs and revenue from shuttered mines and associated industries," said Collins, a professional engineer with more than 30 years of experience in coal industry work.

"Those communities and their local governments have stood up and with a near unanimous voice supported the passage of this important legislation, which they hope will help put their residents back to work. It is our hope that this list serves as a 'to do' list whenever funding is approved."

Fedorko said the RECLAIM Act poses "a rare opportunity for people to write a new history for the region, and build a prosperous world for themselves, their families and their neighbors. Downstream Strategies prides itself on using sound science and community planning to pursue bright futures and the ideas and projects profiled here are sterling examples of those principles."

The research team took a look at hundreds of AML sites across the seven-county region before settling on the 14 proposed RECLAIM sites in the report applying criteria that took into consideration size of the site, proximity to infrastructure and population centers, existing economic development efforts at the site and land ownership.

The team estimated reclamation costs for all 14 sites ranging from nearly \$8 million to north of \$16 million, carrying economic development projected investment requirements of more than \$50 million.

Report recommendations to tweak and/or facilitate passage of the RECLAIM Act include areas mined after 1977 (covered by the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act) should not be automatically excluded from RECLAIM eligible sites; funding eligibility guidelines should mirror current AML funding guidelines; funding should favor projects "that prioritize local investment versus external corporate interests such as prisons and large retailers;" and reform tax structures "to motivate land holding companies to engage in prioritized projects or sell land to an appropriate entity."

Wells said he hopes Congress will approve the RECLAIM Act, if not this year, then 2017.



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