

RAMP funds aid rural communities

HARRISBURG — Rural communities in the coal regions of Pennsylvania are getting a helping hand, thanks to a federal abandoned mine reclamation program designed for rural areas. The help is coming from the Rural Abandoned Mine Program (RAMP) of the USDA Soil Conservation Service.

Pennsylvania has 240,000 acres of abandoned coal mined land, the most of any state. About 20 percent of the national RAMP funds are used in this state, reports Charles Wilson, SCS RAMP leader.

In the seven years that this program has been operating, 96 projects have been completed at a total cost of \$12 million, added Wilson.

Accomplishments include elimination of 204 safety and health hazards, 947 acres of erosion control and 879 acres of visual improvements. Water quality benefits improved 94 miles of streams and 9,725 acres of lakes.

During the past year, 1985, \$1.1 million was spent and 18 projects were completed, states Wilson.

"We are finding changes occurring in rural communities once the safety hazards and visual blights are eliminated," commented Wilson. "Residents are improving their homes and small businesses are starting or expanding. It seems to give the residents a more positive attitude and pride in their area."

Two examples are the Morris Run area in Tioga County and the Broad Top area in northern Bedford County. Sealing of abandoned mine openings, removal of hazardous highwalls and buildings, and elimination of unsightly waste piles and dumps made positive changes in the environment. "Clean up an area's environment and people will make an effort to improve their own property," continued Wilson. "It is an extra benefit from RAMP."

RAMP is funded by tonnage fees paid by today's coal companies. The collected fees go to the U.S. Department of Interior who transfers the portion for RAMP to the Soil Conservation Service.

Rural communities and landowners have made 947 applications for help under RAMP. County and State RAMP Committees have evaluated the applications according to degree of hazard. The most serious hazards are funded first. A total of 341 applications have been classified

as very hazardous and in need of immediate attention.

"We've reclaimed about 1,000 acres out of the 240,000 acres. That may sound insignificant, but to the people who live near the 96 completed RAMP projects, it is changing their lives for the better," concluded Wilson.



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