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Reclamation of Mather coal refuse dump moves forward

By Bob Niedbala, Staff Writer



Mike Jones/Observer-Reporter

Construction equipment sits in front of the coal refuse site in Mather that is in the process of being reclaimed.

Bob Niedbala/Observer-Reporter

Soil was removed from sections of the lake bed at Duke Lake at Ryerson Station State Park to prepare for the restoration of the lake and to provide soil for reclamation of the Mather coal refuse dump.

Reclamation of the Mather coal refuse dump using soil from the dry lake bed of Duke Lake at Ryerson Station State Park is moving ahead well and is now about one-quarter of the way completed, a state Department of Environmental Protection spokesman said Monday.

DEP has proposed trucking about 250,000 cubic yards of soil from Ryerson to Mather, enough to cover the 70-acre coal waste site's rocky surface with two to three feet of clean soil.

About 77,000 cubic yards of soil have been delivered to the Mather site, DEP spokesman John Poister said.

Of that, 42,000 cubic yards has been spread over the surface of the Mather property and another 35,000 cubic yards has been stockpiled to allow it time to dry, he said.

Berner Construction Co., the company hired by DEP to complete the reclamation project, began work in late fall, first leveling the property and remediating the area where the site borders Ten Mile Creek.

The trucking of silt from Ryerson to Mather started a little later than proposed, Poister said. As a result, DEP will most likely extend Berner's contract. The contract, which was to expire Oct. 4, will probably be extended into February.

"By February, everything should be done," Poister said.

When the project was announced in August, DEP and state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources officials touted its benefits both for the replacement of the Ryerson dam and the reclamation of Mather.

"It is a win-win situation," Poister said. "Ryerson will be dredged and the dam will be repaired, and people in Mather will get rid of an eyesore and end up with a beautiful green area."

DCNR had to dredge the lake bed before it could rebuild the dam, but first had to find a place to take the silt. At the same time, before the Mather property could be reclaimed and reused, it had to be capped with clean fill.

Soil in the lake bed has been tested and meets standards for clean fill, Poister said. As part of the project, work also was completed to protect Ten Mile Creek, which runs along one side of the coal refuse site.

"There is almost nothing bad to be said about this whole project," Poister said.

The Mather dump has been in existence for more than 95 years, considering the Mather Mine began operations in 1917. The property was abandoned about 50 years ago.

Part of the refuse site was reclaimed by Greene County Industrial Development Authority starting in 2001.

The project, was halted several years later for lack of funding.

The contract to Berner totaled \$1.59 million. DEP also is providing about \$2 million to truck the soil from Ryerson to Mather. The reclamation project is funded by a federal Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation grant.

Soil removal at Duke Lake is being completed with money DCNR received from Consol Energy as part of a settlement to end litigation over damage to the Duke Lake dam.

Duke Lake has been dry for almost 10 years, since 2005, when inspections revealed expanding cracks in the concrete dam.

DEP determined the damage was caused by subsidence from Consol's Bailey Mine, an allegation the company denied. A settlement to end litigation between DEP, DCNR and Consol, announced in 2013, will result in replacement of the dam.