

Environmental study begins at Mather coal refuse site

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By Bob Niedbala, Staff Writer



John Stefanko of the state Department of Environmental Protection speaks in August at a ceremony at the Mather coal refuse dump on plans to reclaim the site using sediment from the now-dry Duke Lake.
(Photo courtesy of the Observer-Reporter)

WAYNESBURG – An environmental engineering firm hired by the Greene County Industrial Development Authority will begin work this week to prepare an initial environmental assessment at the Mather coal refuse site.

Representatives of Langan Engineering and Environmental Services Inc. are expected to be on-site today to begin the study, authority Manager Crystal Simmons told the GCIDA board Wednesday.

Langan will complete the initial environmental study of the 139-acre site and prepare an application for a state grant to conduct a more comprehensive environmental study in the second phase and to develop a remediation plan.

Langan was able to proceed with the assessment after the Greene County commissioners last month approved the allocation of \$15,000 to GCIDA for the work. The authority is partly funded by the county.

The Mather property is now being reclaimed by the state Department of Environmental Protection and state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The reclamation involves covering the surface of the site with soil removed from the now-dry Duke Lake at Ryerson Station State Park.

GCIDA, which owns the Mather property, will be developing a plan to reuse the site once reclamation work is completed.

The board Wednesday discussed possible uses for the site, including development of the property for recreation, such as soccer and baseball fields. It also discussed partnering with local municipalities or organizations to help fund maintenance costs of any recreational facilities.

Langan also has proposed conducting a marketing analysis of the site once reclamation is completed, Simmons said. That would involve looking at possible uses, community needs and interest by local groups or businesses in helping fund projects at the site.

“We don’t want to sit on our hands and find they have completed the site (reclamation) and we still don’t have a plan,” said Joe Simatic, authority chairman.

Before it can make final plans, however, it has to know whether there will be any restrictions on the property’s use after reclamation is completed. DEP has standards for reclaimed property that differ, based on whether the property will be reused for housing and recreation or industry.

In other business, Simmons announced the authority’s Brownfield Redevelopment Advisory Committee will meet at 10 a.m. May 13 following the authority’s next meeting.

The committee, formed to help the authority identify possible brownfield sites, held its first meeting in February. About 20 residents and county and municipal officials were in attendance.

GCIDA has applied for a \$400,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to inventory brownfield sites and assess those that could possibly be redeveloped.

Once it has a list of brownfield sites and knows something of their potential for redevelopment, GCIDA will apply for additional state and federal grants to prepare the properties for re-use.

At the May committee meeting, Simmons said, the authority will discuss the list of properties included in the inventory prepare so far by the authority.

Any resident or municipal official who might have knowledge about a potential brownfield and would like it to be added to the inventory should attend the meeting, she said.

A brownfield is land previously used for industrial or commercial purposes that may be contaminated by low levels of hazardous materials which complicates the land being reused or redeveloped.

Simmons also reported she is planning a meeting for local real estate agents and owners of commercial properties interested in participating in a new website to market commercial and industrial properties in Greene County.

Information from the county's website, greensitesearch.com, is linked to a similar website called Pittsburgh Prospector, which covers a 10 county region in Southwestern Pennsylvania, as well as to PA site search, the state's website for marketing commercial and industrial properties.

The Greene County site will give real estate agencies and others who want to sell commercial and industrial land not only local but also state and national exposure, Simmons said.

The site includes information about the county's census data, labor force information and consumer spending. Pictures and maps of specific properties can also be included on the site.

The website is being developed by the IDA, the county department of economic development and county department of information technology.

The meeting to explain the site will be held at the end of this month or at the beginning of May.