

GCIDA applies for grant to inventory brownfields

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WAYNESBURG – Greene County Industrial Development Authority applied for a \$400,000 grant from the federal Environmental Protection Agency to inventory and assess the county's brownfield sites.

The authority applied for the grant in December and expects to learn whether it will receive an award later in the year, said Crystal Simmons, the authority's manager.

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

The sites could range from small properties once used as gasoline stations and may have contaminated soils or underground storage tanks to large coal refuse dumps, such as those in Mather and Nemaocolin.

The grant will be used to hire an environmental consultant to inventory the sites and to conduct assessments on those considered priorities based on factors including the hazard they may represent to the public and the possibility of reuse, Simmons said.

The EPA has another grant program that provides money to reclaim brownfield sites. The authority hopes to apply to that grant program after the inventory and assessments are completed and sites are identified that possibly could be reclaimed and developed, she said.

That is the point of the program, she said: "Returning environmentally-challenged and under-utilized land and buildings to productive use."

Joe Simatic, chairman of the authority board, said the authority hopes to inventory all brownfields in the county. It will then prioritize those on which an environmental assessment will be completed.

"We'll have to identify those sites which have the best chance of getting funding for reclamation," he said. Simatic said he personally would like to see the authority look closely at former mine properties in the southeastern corner of the county.

Some initial work was already completed to identify what might be priority brownfield sites. Simmons said the authority also discussed the program with several municipalities.

Part of the process will be an outreach program. In addition, a brownfield redevelopment advisory committee will be formed to help guide the program. Members of the authority will serve on the committee as well as interested residents, Simmons said.