

Reclamation work at the Mather coal refuse site nearly finished

BY BOB NIEDBALA, OBSERVER-REPORTER APRIL 18, 2016



Photo by Bob Niedbala – Observer-Reporter

The Mather coal refuse site now contains fields of green grass after excavated silt from Duke Lake at Ryerson Station State Park was transported to reclaim the site.

MATHER – The grass is starting to green on the 65-acre Mather coal refuse site, but it may be a while before officials can determine what use can be made of the reclaimed property.

As part of the reclamation project, the refuse pile was covered with 2 or more feet of soil taken from the lake bed at Duke Lake at Ryerson Station State Park. The property has been fertilized and seeded.

“It looks great,” said Crystal Simmons, director of the Greene County Industrial Development Authority, which owns the property. “It’s very green.”

Some minor erosion and sedimentation control work still must be completed by the contractor hired by the state Department of Environmental Protection to do the reclamation work. That is expected to wrap up by July 4, Simmons said.

The site then must sit idle for a year “to make sure all the work is done, everything has held up and there are no slides or anything like that,” she said.

About 250,000 cubic yards of soil was trucked to the property from Ryerson Station State Park and was used to cover the gray coal waste, after erosion ditches were filled, the property was leveled and its sides were sloped.

When the project was first announced in August 2015, the plan, devised by DEP and the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources was to reclaim Mather but also to remove silt from the lake bed at Ryerson in preparation for the rebuilding of the Duke Lake dam.

DCNR announced last July it would not rebuild the dam because of continued ground movement near the park but the work at Mather continued.

After the property sits idle for a year, Simmons said, the authority will then have to consider what other environmental assessments must be completed to determine what possible uses can be made of the property.

Some limitations might apply to the property’s use because it is classified as abandoned mine land, she said. What exactly those limitations might be will be determined by further environmental assessments.

The authority expects to have public meetings as it gets closer to the reclamation project’s completion to inform residents what is going on and to discuss the possible uses for the site, Simmons said.

The authority also is moving forward with an environmental assessment of the adjoining 27 acre of land it obtained years ago from Atlas Services. The property is not considered abandoned mine land but contains several piles of old railroad ties, Simmons said.

The authority last week filed an application for a \$200,000 grant to conduct the assessment through the state Department of Community and Economic Development’s Industrial Sites Reuse Program.

The application was first filed with DEP for its review before being submitted to DCED, Simmons said.

The assessment will identify any environmental problems that might exist on the property. The authority will then have to apply for additional grants to complete any cleanup work that may be needed there, she said.

The assessment also will cover the adjoining reservoir property owned by Morgan Township.

The DCED grant will require a local match. The county and Morgan Township are each kicking in \$15,000 and the Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds has provided the authority \$20,000 for the project, Simmons said.