

Officials Dedicate Completion Of Ecosystem Restoration

Local, state and federal officials and guests gathered Monday morning (June 23, 2008), on a hilltop on Lick Branch to dedicate the completed Ely and Puckett Creeks Ecosystem Restoration Project initiated in 1997 (with a feasibility study).

The project was constructed in two phases, with Phase I including the Bog and Everglades sites and Phase II including the Lick Branch and Big Branch sites and the Bean creek seep.

Phase I construction was completed in June 2004 and Phase II in April 2008, at costs of \$1.8 million and \$1.6 million, respectively.

Ron Flanary, executive director of the Lenowisco Planning District Commission, opened the event Monday, with speakers including Ninth District Congressman Rick Boucher, Colonel Bernard Lindstrom, of the Nashville District Corps of Engineers; Butch Lambert, director of the Virginia Department of Mined Land Reclamation (DMLR); and Mark Carter, Chairman of the Lee County Board of Supervisors.

Flanary praised Boucher (federal congressman since 1982, state senator prior to that), as being "the best" of the 435 total Congressional members. Flanary said he is amazed at the level of engagement of Boucher in his work with projects of water provision and restoration, and more. He said Boucher is a great supporter of Lenowisco and an ally for clean drinking water.

Boucher, in turn, expressed admiration for Flanary, who will relinquish his title (with retirement) to Skip Skinner on July 1, for his "tremendous leadership" in extending Broadband capability into all the counties in the Ninth District.

He commended Flanary's foresight with taking the technology backbone along the trenches of water and sewer lines, with voice, video and data, which brought the Results Call Center.

Boucher said he helps with funding, which has brought the number of homes with clean drinking water from 35 percent several years ago to 85 percent currently.

He described the ecosystem as a major step forward in the advancement of water restoration (from acid mine drainage) with the clean water now supporting aquatic life to the Powell River, saying the river basin has the greatest number of at-risk fish and mussel species of any other stream in the United States (29 percent of rare mussels and 19 species of rare fish).

Project partners are DMME and the LENOWISCO Planning District Commission, with Lee County serving as the non-federal sponsor. Dane Poe, advisor.

Cooperating agencies include

the Office of Surface Mining (OSM), Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (GIF), The Nature Conservancy, and

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

The project is funded with 65 percent Federal money and 35 percent non federal money. DMME provided the required matching monies from the AML, 10 percent Acid Mine Drainage

Set Aside Program, Appalachian Clean Streams Program, and Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) Funds.

Boucher said the water is filtered through pipes and ponds, using natural flow construction (no electricity), a system "for

all time" for the tributaries of Powell River.

Boucher said local residents have told members of the Corps that fish are now swimming in the water. Cattails and limestone are part of the filtering system.

"Our goal is to build similar ecosystem restoration projects along the creeks of Straight, Reeds, Jones, Cox, Bundy, Crab Orchard, and Pigeon Creek and Jordan Branch," he added.

Colonel Lindstrom acknowledged Benny Wampler from DMME (the Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy) for work done to complete the project, along with the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency), TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority), County Supervisor Mark Carter, (District 5) and Claude Ray (District 4), and Jeff Linkinhoker, project manager, with the Corps.

Flanary described Linkinhoker as his "constant," who works stateside and abroad with the Corps, also Lenowisco office manager Marie Jones, Dwayne Miller and Skip Skinner.

Lindstrom also acknowledged Lee County Administrator Dane Poe, advisory for the project, and said Lee County "stepped up to the plate" for the project. The success of the local ecosystem is important nationally as an example for the preservation of endangered species, he said.

He introduced Coeburn High School student Samantha Perry, who entered a working model of the ecosystem in the Wise County CEDAR (Coal Education Development and Resources of Virginia) Fair, and won. He presented Perry with a certificate of appreciation for her interest and as incentive to future scientists.

Lambert, DMLR, said the cooperative work of local, state and federal government is starting to reap rewards, adding that several other sites need attention, and pledging, "We will continue to participate, donate and commit to

ecosystem projects."

Flanary said the initial stress was on providing clean drinking water, with the ecosystem projects a side bar when the Corps asked "... What else can we do?" He acknowledged the county administrator and supervisory board members Carter, Ray and Larry Mosley (District 3).

Ray offered an opening prayer and the benediction.

Speaking in behalf of the county's board of supervisors, Chairman Carter expressed thanks to those "being a part of this special day. He said Lee County is pleased to be the sponsor for the Ely and Puckett Creeks Ecosystem Restoration Project. "We have been working on this project for a number of years, and our County Administrator, Dane Poe, has been an advocate and a participant in the Advisory Committee since the late 1990s," he added.

Over the years, he said Lee County has actively worked with state and federal agencies to make the ecosystem project a reality, adding. "It has been a pleasure to have worked with the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy, LENOWISCO Planning District Commission, the Nashville District Corps of Engineers and many others who made this success a reality. This restoration project is a shining example of what can be accomplished when local, state, and federal agencies work together toward a common goal.

"This is a time for Lee County to be proud - and Lee County is proud to own the Ely and Puckett Creeks Ecosystem Restoration Project. These cutting edge systems are cleaning up the acid mine drainage from abandoned coal mines, helping to restore our important ecosystem. Lee County is environmentally aware, and we will continue to look for ways to make our home a greener and more environmentally friendly place to live.

"Lee County is beautiful, our natural resources rich and our ecosystems diverse. We are blessed to live in such a great place, and I speak for the Board of Supervisors in saying that we want to make it even better. This project is a clear example of our commitment to that dream.

"We have a success story to tell - and here behind me (alluding to the project in view), you can see this success. The Ely and Puckett Creeks Ecosystem Restoration Project is an important step for Lee County, but it could not be achieved without the cooperation of all the agencies present today. Thank you for helping Lee County and for making this project a reality and a success!"



Hilltop View

Ron Flanary, Congressman Rick Boucher and Colonel Bernard Lindstrom (left photo) view the Ely-Puckett Creek Ecosystem Restoration Project from a hilltop on Lick Branch. Officials cut the ribbon of dedication Monday (June 23, 2008) of the completion of the project with Boucher and Mark Carter (lower right) serving as guest speakers. Officials in the upper right photo, left to right, are Butch Lambert, Colonel Lindstrom, Boucher, Carter, Claude Ray and Flanary.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CONGRESSMAN RICK BOUCHER'S OFFICE

