Congressman H. Morgan Griffith
9th District of Virginia
Written Testimony for the Record
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations
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Thank you for holding this hearing today and providing me the opportunity to highlight a matter of great importance to my district as you move forward in the appropriations process.

A top priority of mine is to address the need for adequate funding for coal communities in Virginia, and throughout much of Appalachia, to reclaim abandoned mine lands in a way that will support economic development and transition our economy that has been built on coal.

As you may be aware, money for abandoned mine land (AML) reclamation for the top three states with the most unmet reclamation needs -- Kentucky, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania -- has been included in the spending bills that have come to the House floor the past few years. While those states have more sites in need of cleanup, the second tier of states -- Virginia, Alabama, and Ohio – also have a legacy of coal mining that includes sites that need restoration.

Over the past few years, with the help of members on this committee and my friend from Ohio, Mr. Johnson, we have worked to expand this program to those next three Appalachian states with the greatest unmet needs. I have worked with this committee to ensure that additional support for one Appalachian community does not come at the expense of another. In total we have been successful in securing $40 million ($10 million per year over the past four years) in reclamation funding for Virginia.

We have already seen some amazing projects come forward as a result of this pilot. Some examples of projects under consideration and selected for approval from the grant program include:

- A large solar project that will be built on abandoned mine land.

- A project that will plant hemp on previously mined lands to remove heavy metals, oils, and other toxins from the soil.

- An ecotourism project that will improve 350 acres of abandoned mine land with ecological and economic benefits and provide access to over 2,500 acres in an area of the Commonwealth that is currently devoid of areas for general public access, especially those that provide wildlife related opportunities

- A sustainable community farming project on abandoned mine land.

- The cleanup of land that was once a former coal preparation plant and is now a coal fines pit. The land will be returned to the county Industrial Development Authority (IDA) and transitioned into an industrial site encompassing 232 acres.

- The removal of an unstable highwall and use of existing onsite material to build another large industrial facility.

- The construction of a 50,000 sq. ft. industrial sized greenhouse located on abandoned mine land.

- The closure of multiple mine portals and conversion of access roads and abandoned land to expand local trail use for hiking, biking, ATV and equestrian uses.

- The installation of a public water service to provide cleaner water to a community.

- The conversion of reclaimed land into a year-round music venue.

One of the pillars of a strong economy is adaptability. In my part of Virginia, we are taking land that is no longer usable for its former purpose of coal production and transitioning it to future uses. The reclamation work itself creates jobs, and the uses the land is put to, whether industrial or tourism, supports jobs and economic growth as well. The economic benefit can be industrial repurposing or tourism.

This additional funding is needed to really get in and do some work to help these Appalachian coal communities that have been economically devastated, while at the same time helping reduce the environmental impact of un-reclaimed mine lands.

I encourage you to ensure this level of funding for economic reclamation – if not a greater and more balanced allocation – is provided in the FY21 appropriations bill this subcommittee will write.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify and I look forward to answering any questions you might have.