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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 27, 2017

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Russell County Students Help Reclaim Abandoned Mine Land Site at Arbor Day Celebration

Russell County, Va.- Over 300 Russell County students helped with reclamation at what was once known as the worst mine-related impact on the Clinch River—Hurricane Fork Gob Pile. The students planted 1,500 trees at the site where 1.5 million tons of material was removed over the last two years. Oaks, redbuds, flowering crab apples and blight resistant American chestnuts now cover a portion of the previously mined site.

The annual Arbor Day event, hosted by the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy (DMME), The Virginia Coal and Energy Alliance (VCEA) and the Virginia Oil and Gas Association (VOGA) teaches students about the importance of environmental protection during and after coal mining and natural gas production is complete. This is the 13th Arbor Day celebration.

Since Arbor Day began in 2005 over 8,000 trees have been planted on 30 acres of mined land. That land will once again become a forest thanks to the work of students across southwest Virginia.

The Hurricane Fork Gob Pile was reclaimed by Gobco. The material removed from the site was used at Dominion's Virginia City Hybrid Energy Center for electricity production. The gob or garbage of bituminous was left behind during historic mining. When the mine opened in 1907, technology did not exist to separate the small pieces of coal from the rock. In addition to removing the material, Dumps Creek was also restored back to health after decades of receiving sediment from the pile. Dumps Creek is a tributary to the Clinch River.

Awards were also presented at the event for student artwork and excellence in reclamation.

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Students submitted artwork based on the theme, “Cleaning up the Clinch While Powering Virginia.” Regan Trent, a student at the Castlewood Learning Center took the top prize. His design was featured on t-shirts worn by students at the event.

Gobco was awarded for its reclamation at the host site and at the Cranes Nest gob site in Wise County. Red River Coal Company also received an award for reclamation of an over 2,000-acre surface mine site in Wise County. All three used the forestry reclamation approach and in a few years these sites will become thriving forests.

Richard Davis, retiring DMME Abandoned Mine Lands Project Coordinator, was also recognized for his dedication in organizing and volunteering at all Arbor Day celebrations.

The event was sponsored by: Dominion, Gobco, Savage, Buchanan Minerals, Consol Energy, Contura Energy, Coal Mining Engineering, Enervest, Noah Horn Drilling, Southwest Virginia Sportsmen, SunCoke Energy-Jewell, Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, Virginia Department of Forestry, VCEA, VOGA and DMME.

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