

Three Fork Creek project recognized on national level

A West Virginia Abandoned Mine Lands Program project that restored life to Three Fork Creek in Preston and Taylor counties has been recognized on the national level.

The National Association of Abandoned Mine Land Programs (NAAML) presented the Three Fork Creek Watershed Restoration Project with the Appalachian Regional Award during its national conference this week at Glade Springs Resort in Daniels, W.Va.

The NAAML membership, consisting of AML programs from 31 states and tribes, selected this year's award winners for their exemplary work in restoring lands and waters negatively impacted by pre-law mining.

"I'm thrilled to be recognized on a national stage for work our AML program has done," said Robert Rice, West Virginia's AML chief.

The \$750,500 Three Fork project began in July of 2010. It set out to improve water quality and aesthetics on a stream that once was a favorite spot for trout enthusiasts, but had been rendered virtually lifeless by years of polluted mine drainage from pre-law coal operations in the area.

Working with West Virginia University and a local watershed group (Save the Tygart), the state Department of Environmental Protection's AML program placed four acid mine drainage treatment stations in the heavily impacted headwater tributaries of Three Fork Creek. It wasn't long before improvements were seen.

Three Fork, which empties into the Tygart Valley River at Grafton, soon became not only supportive of recreational activities once again, but of fish and bug habitat as well.

Pre-treatment surveys conducted on the creek in 2010 turned up but one fish. Just a year and a half after the Three Fork project commenced, a second fish sampling resulted in 1,605 total fish caught and released.

"In about 18 months, this stream went from nothing to having thousands of fish," Rice said. "I don't know of any other projects out there that can take that kind of credit."