

Final Report
Eastern Kentucky Environmental Research Institute
Kentucky River Authority Watershed Grant
FY 2005-2006

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Eastern Kentucky Environmental Research Institute used its 2005-2006 KRA Watershed Grant to pay towards the OSM/VISTA cost-share so that a fulltime watershed organizer could be placed in Letcher County, KY. This grant helped bring the *Letcher Co: Head of Three Rivers Project* continue into a second year of success. The rest of the cost-share for the project was received through a grant received from the World Wildlife Funds' Southeastern Rivers and Streams Fund.

Highlights of Year Two Thus Far

- The Lexington Herald Leader, featured a cover story about the *Head of Three Rivers Project* and the work of the Appalachian Coal Country Watershed Team. This was the first major press coverage of the project and was successfully at raising the visibility of Acid Mine Drainage and citizen efforts to seek remediation. This has given the project legitimacy across the state and has opened many doors and potential partnerships.
- The OSM/VISTA organized a group of local citizens to incorporate a water-oriented non-profit, Headwaters Inc. This is the first formal watershed organization in East Kentucky and should prove to be an effective institutional vehicle to continue and to sustain the work that the *Head of Three Rivers Project* has initiated.
- The OSM/VISTA has attended scientific gatherings to present the results of “The Big Dip” water sampling project that sampled 917 first order streams in East Kentucky. Attending professional gatherings such as the Kentucky Academy of Sciences and UVa-Wise Wetlands Symposium has spread the visibility of the project and generated contacts and connections in the regional scientific community.
- The OSM/VISTA wrote a \$200,000 EPA Brownfields Assessment proposal and submitted it through the Letcher County Conservation District. The proposal asks for funds to complete an assessment of Acid Mine Drainage in Letcher County, KY. This is the first Mine Scarred Lands Brownfields assessment submitted in Kentucky. This proposal was not funded but the district will reapply next round.
- Received a \$5,000 grant from the World Wildlife Fund to pursue a community-based approach to formulating a need-based sewer plan for the Cumberland River section of Letcher County. This grant was submitted through Mennonite Central Committee – Appalachia and is a step towards working with faith-based communities in an area that considers itself “the forgotten part” of Letcher County.

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- The OSM/VISTA helped the Cowan Community Center apply for PRIDE funds to construct an outdoor classroom. The grant was approved and the classroom has been built onto the back of the community center, facing Cowan Creek.
- Created a user-friendly Powerpoint presentation of the 2006 Watershed Watch data for 2006 and have organized local presentations of this data.
- When an Acid Mine Drainage blow out occurred on Dry Fork, the OSM/VISTA worked with the local media and alerted the state agencies to the problem. Since this time, the OSM/VISTA has monitored the site regularly.
- The OSM/VISTA organized a group of Letcher County Central High School students to conduct some in-stream water sampling of a pre-law Acid Mine Drainage site on Dry Fork. Students performed field chemistry, looked for macroinvertebrates, and collected grab samples that were lab analyzed for iron, manganese, and sulfates. A group of students from New York University that was in town worked with Appalshop and produced a short video entitled *Creeks in Crisis* that has been regularly aired on the Letcher County School Systems television station.
- The OSM/VISTA made presentations at the Kentucky River Watershed Watch and Upper Cumberland Watershed Watch annual conferences to talk about watershed efforts in Letcher County. These were well received and there is now more acknowledgement that Letcher County is a place in which a lot is happening and Watershed Watch money is being well spent.
- The OSM/VISTA worked with a variety of community partners to submit a \$91,000 Level I EPA CARE assessment proposal to assess and prioritize the impacts to the water, air, land, and in-door environments of Letcher County. The CARE program is one of EPA's newest program and to our knowledge we are the first group to apply in Kentucky or in coal country. (Unfortunately, not as much money was allotted as expected and our proposal was not chosen but it has been placed in their reserve pile.)
- The Hach corporation donated their highest quality multiprobe, the HQ40d, for use in Acid Mine Drainage sampling and other efforts for which accurate pH and conductivity numbers. This improves the quality of the data and speeds up a variety of sampling.
- Organized for three AmeriCorps*VISTA Summer Associates to complete 8 week internships. Two will be hosted by Eastern Kentucky University and will be testing headwaters streams in the Big Sandy basin as a continuation of the "Big Dip" project. The third will be working the Jenkins Utility Commission to find ways that the city can seek funding to alleviate its water quality and infrastructure problems.

AGENCIES AND GROUPS INVOLVED

-**Headwaters, Inc** (newly formed community watershed organization built around the *Head of Three Rivers Project*. Headwaters is the first community watershed organization in Eastern Kentucky)

-**Kentucky Watershed Watch** (statewide program divided up by river basin that provides training and equipment for volunteer stream monitoring)

-**Cowan Community Center** (local community center with Head Start, Youth Group, and a variety of activities. We received a community environmental education grant to focus on Cowan Creek and an outdoor classroom grant. *There are two AmeriCorps positions at the community center that I regularly work with on youth work and water sampling.*)

-**PRIDE (Personal Responsibility in a Desirable Environment)** (East Kentucky PRIDE, Inc. is an initiative to clean up the environment of Eastern Kentucky. I have worked with PRIDE in the Letcher County schools and have organized cleanups sponsored by them.)

-**Letcher County 911 Office** (the local government office over mapping and signage. I'm working with the 911 Office on using their equipment and knowledge to put up signage for sample points)

-**Letcher County Water & Sewer District** (the public utility that covers the parts of the county that aren't inside incorporated city limits. Their staff and board have been very helpful in catching me up on past efforts in this county and keeping me informed of current developments)

-**Letcher County Conservation District** (Local water and soil conservation district that also houses the regional Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff member. The conservation district is a helpful source of local knowledge and has experience with mine land reclamation through the Rural Abandoned Mines Program (RAMP). The Conservation District has provided a small amount of funding and unsuccessfully applied for a Brownfields Assessment in conjunction with the *Head of Three Rivers* project.

-**Mennonite Central Committee – Appalachia** (Mennonite Central Committee has had an Appalachian service office since 1961. During this time MCC has worked on a number of poverty-related issues with the goal of empowering local citizens. MCC and *The Head of Three Rivers* are partnering on a project to involve citizens in the Upper Cumberland River Basin with water sampling and creating a need-based sewer plan.)

-**Kentucky Waterways Alliance** (a statewide water-oriented non-profit that aims to protect Kentucky's waterways and provides trainings, resources, and help for local organizations. Is currently helping *The Head of Three Rivers* move towards organizational sustainability and connect with other organizations across the state.)

DATE OF COMPLETION

This project is ongoing, however the second year of the *Head of Three Rivers Project* will be completed on November 18, 2007.