

The Honorable Rob Bishop
Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources
123 Cannon Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Raúl M. Grijalva
Ranking Member, Committee on Natural Resources
1511 Longworth Building
Washington, DC 20515

June 26, 2017

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we urge you to vote yes on the amendment to H.R. 1731 offered by Representative Don Beyer and to pass the RECLAIM Act of 2017 (H.R.1731).

The RECLAIM Act would use \$1 billion of funds sitting idle in Washington to clean up abandoned coal mines and provide a vital economic boost for struggling coal communities. The bill is sponsored by Congressman Hal Rogers (R-KY) and a set of bipartisan cosponsors in the House.

Communities struggling with the decline of the coal industry have been calling for this legislation since 2015, when nearly 30 local governments and representative bodies across Appalachia demonstrated their support for the RECLAIM Act, leading to its introduction.

H.R. 1731 would disburse \$1 billion from the Abandoned Mine Land (AML) Fund to put thousands of laid-off coal miners and others to work cleaning up dangerous abandoned mine sites.¹ The RECLAIM Act would also spur the reuse of abandoned mines for long-term economic development opportunities on and around reclaimed sites.

Funds authorized under H.R. 1731 would be used exclusively for reclamation of pre-SMCRA abandoned coal mines. However, reclaimed mine lands and the areas surrounding them have great potential to be reused as sites for new, exciting economic endeavors—including in agriculture, recreation tourism, and more—and the bill should leverage this potential. H.R. 1731 represents a significant investment in coal communities across the country, but in order to achieve the highest return on that investment, the legislation must prioritize projects that would tie mine reclamation with long-term economic development. Current language does not do that. For this reason, we urge you to support Rep. Don Beyer’s amendment to H.R. 1731.

¹ Brown, Dylan, “Sparks Fly Amid Dueling Narratives on Stream Rule.” E&E News. March 23, 2016. URL: <<https://www.eenews.net/eenewspm/2016/03/23/stories/1060034546>>

Under existing law, the \$1 billion from the AML Fund will be disbursed for mine reclamation beginning in 2023. The RECLAIM Act speeds up the disbursement of this money to create immediate economic benefits at a moment when many coal mining communities are undergoing significant economic distress. The RECLAIM Act seeks to turn environmental liabilities into economic assets. H.R. 1731 does not use one penny of taxpayer money, nor does it increase AML fees or any taxes. It disburses existing funds to accomplish the purpose for which they were collected: reclaiming pre-1977 abandoned mines. It has no impact on the reclamation of current mining or on the coal industry.

Abandoned mines and associated polluted waters deter economic development. They pose threats to human health and safety. And, the cost of reclaiming these mines and waters will likely increase over time, as fuel prices and inflation rise and abandoned mines continue to deteriorate.

We cannot wait any longer to get this \$1 billion out of Washington and to states to clean up mines and catalyze economic opportunities in struggling communities. We must act now. We urge you to pass the amendment to H.R. 1731 offered by Representative Beyer that would help spur economic projects on reclaimed mines, and pass H.R. 1731 immediately.

Sincerely,

National Association of Development Organizations

BlueGreen Alliance

Environmental and Energy Study Institute

Environmental Integrity Project

Institute for Sustainable Power

National Wildlife Federation

The Sierra Club

Union of Concerned Scientists

Utility Workers Union of America

Voices for Progress

The Wilderness Society

Alabama

Gasp

Colorado

Western Slope Conservation Center

Western Colorado Congress

Illinois

Eco-Justice Collaborative

Chicago Southeast Side Coalition to Ban Petrocoke

Southern Illinoisans Against Fracturing Our Environment

Livingston Law Firm

Kentucky

Appalachian Citizens' Law Center

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth

Kentucky Resources Council, Inc.

Mountain Association of Community and Economic Development

Maryland

Waterkeepers Chesapeake

Minnesota

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

Montana

Northern Plains Resource Council

Western Organization of Resource Councils

North Carolina

Appalachian Voices

New York

Citizens For Water

Damascus Citizens For Sustainability

NYh2o

Pennsylvania

Citizens Coal Council

Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation

Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds

Mountain Watershed Association

Pennsylvania Abandoned Mine Lands Campaign

Youghiogheny Riverkeeper

Tennessee

Roane County Environmental Review Board

Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment

West Virginia

The Alliance for Appalachia

Coal River Mountain Watch

West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy

West Virginia Rivers Coalition