



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

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New Pool Open for Swimming at Breaks Interstate Park alongside Zena's Place Concession Stand *An Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization Grant of \$300,000 Contributed Toward Construction*

Breaks, Va. – Back by popular demand, a swimming pool is now open at Breaks Interstate Park. The new attraction is open to visitors making their way to the Grand Canyon of the South and the community surrounding the park. The Breaks Interstate Park Commission received \$300,000 from the Virginia Department of Energy's (Virginia Energy) Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization (AMLER) grant to help cover the costs of this new addition. AMLER is a federally funded program and is administered by Virginia Energy.

"Breaks Interstate Park is home to a variety of family-friendly activities," **said U.S. Representative Morgan Griffith**. "A new swimming pool addition to its waterpark facility creates more appeal to visit and explore a premier State Park in Southwest Virginia."

"This AMLER project is a celebrated and important piece to the economic development work underway by Virginia Energy," **said Virginia Energy Director Glenn Davis**. "Community development and tourism is an attraction to new businesses looking to develop on former mined land in our coalfield communities."

"The addition of a 3,200 square foot swimming pool and diving area has been one of the park's top priorities for over a decade. It was the most requested amenity by our guests," **said Breaks Interstate Park Superintendent Austin Bradley**. "Getting to the finish line was not an easy task, but the excellent work of our staff and our contractors along with the unwavering support of our funders has finally made it possible for us to provide this service to all park visitors."

“The Breaks Interstate Park is a crucial piece to ecotourism in southwest Virginia,” **said Virginia Senator Todd Pillion**. “I am pleased to see so many funding sources and community partners realizing the same value in investing in this treasure we have in Dickenson County and am excited to see the impact it has over time.”

The pool was added to the existing waterpark and already has met capacity several times since opening Memorial Day weekend. Breaks Interstate Park already had over 12,000 people visit the waterpark each season. The pool’s opening is expected to increase revenue by nearly \$100,000 annually and create five to seven new seasonal jobs.

“The Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA) was pleased to be a funding partner, along with the Virginia Energy AMLER program, on this very important improvement at the Breaks Interstate Park,” **said VCEDA Executive Director Jonathan Belcher**. “VCEDA approved nearly two million dollars which we know will contribute to a big boost to regional tourism and recreation.”

A portion of that VCEDA funding, \$500,000, was in partnership with the Industrial Development Authority of Dickenson County through the VCEDA Dickenson County Account.

“The Industrial Development Authority of Dickenson County recognizes the impact that the Breaks Interstate Park has on the local economy of Dickenson County,” **said Dickenson County Economic Development Director Dana Cronkhite**. “We were happy to support this wonderful project, as it not only improves the existing waterpark, but it adds another important element in attracting visitors to the park, the county and our region.”

Breaks Interstate Park is a major economic driver for Buchanan and Dickenson counties in Virginia and for Pike County in Kentucky. With an annual revenue of over \$3 million, the unique attraction has 10 full time employees and provides 85 seasonal jobs for area high school and college students.

One of those students, 17-year-old Zena Newsome, was the very first person to use the new pool. Unfortunately, she lost her life in a tragic vehicle crash on May 16th. A rising senior at East Ridge High School, Zena was known for being a hard worker, even assisting contractors during the final phases of the project. The waterpark concession stand will be dedicated in her memory at a later date as Zena’s Place. Virginia Energy will place a plaque in the concession stand recognizing her public service to the AMLER program.

“During the course of my career, I have had the opportunity to work with many young people, most of whom gain their first work experience at the Breaks. Zena will always stand out to me for her enthusiasm for life and other people,” **added Bradley**. “I hope that naming the concession stand in her honor and hanging the plaque will contribute in some small way to the healing of the many people who loved her.”

The AMLER program originated in a federal omnibus bill in 2017, Virginia Energy has received \$10 to \$11.7 million annually for economic development on abandoned mine lands

The program is administered by the Office of Surface Mining and Reclamation Enforcement. The grants are managed by Virginia Energy's Abandoned Mine Land (AML) program.

[Virginia Energy's AML program](#) was created in 1981 and is federally funded to reclaim issues left behind by coal mining that occurred before 1977. Funding has been limited in the past meaning only the highest priority problems were able to be reclaimed. The projects were a safety threat to residents or had a significant negative environmental impact.