



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY**

1100 Bank Street (8th Floor), Richmond, VA 23219  
Office: (804) 692-3200 | TDD: (800) 828-1120

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Tarah Kesterson

[press@energy.virginia.gov](mailto:press@energy.virginia.gov)

## **Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization Funds Support Growth of Successful Ecotourism Industry in Buchanan County**

*The AMLER project will fund turning 300 acres of an historic surface coal mine into a larger habitat for wildlife.*

Richmond, VA – Virginia Energy has awarded a \$2,254,750 Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization (AMLER) grant to boost Buchanan County's thriving elk-based ecotourism industry. This funding will support a project designed to increase both elk populations and tourism revenue in the coming years. The project builds on the successful 2012 effort to reintroduce elk to the region's mountains for the first time in over a century. By further developing this wildlife resource, the grant aims to enhance the elk's role as a cornerstone of the local economy, attracting more visitors and expanding the significant economic benefits already realized since the animals' return.

“Grundy is the elk capital of Virginia,” **said U.S. Congressman Morgan Griffith.** “This AMLER project supports an industry with deep commercial and cultural ties to Buchanan County.”

“Developing hundreds of acres of surface coal mined land as a habitat for elk and numerous other native species is a true testament to innovative reclamation and environmental stewardship,” **said Virginia Energy Director Glenn Davis.** “Opportunities built around these now established herds, such as UTV trails, campgrounds, restaurants, and festivals, only increase the visitors to beautiful Buchanan County.”

The AMLER project will fund turning 300 acres of an historic surface coal mine into a larger habitat for wildlife. It also creates the first of its kind public hunting opportunity. The land included in the project will be the first in Virginia where hunters may use utility task vehicles or UTVs to access public hunting lands. As part of the project, a UTV was purchased for the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) to ensure public safety on the lands.

“The re-establishment of elk has been a major success in large part due to the habitat created from the mining processes and the lands used,” **said DWR Elk Project Leader Jackie Rosenberger.** “This project allows growing room for the herd and creates a variety of opportunities for wildlife enthusiasts visiting the region.”

The DWR is working alongside Southwest Virginia Sportsmen to develop and maintain the habitat. They will also build viewing areas for public wanting to watch elk, white tail deer, bear, turkey, and hundreds of birds and butterflies.

“The demand to see elk is already growing. Tours to view elk this fall are sold out and we hosted over 1,000 visitors here, including some from other countries, on viewing tours last year,” **said Southwest Virginia Sportsmen President Leon Boyd.** “The AMLER funding is a great investment in a project that highlights our love for the outdoors and the numbers already show people will come to hunt, fish, play, or just take in the views.”

The AMLER program began in 2017 and 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.

