

OSM Director Praises Kanawha County, WV, Industry/Community Reforestation Partnership

April 23, 2003 1:05 PM ET

Charleston, W. Va. (April 23, 2003) -- Jeff Jarrett, director of the US Office of Surface Mining, celebrated Earth Day 2003 by planting trees at an innovative West Virginia site where the nation's second largest coal company has joined hands with the local community, watershed groups and schools to restore mined lands.

"This is my favorite kind of story," said Jarrett, speaking at the Samples, WV, mine operated by Arch Coal's Catenary subsidiary. "What an outstanding example of industry, academia and the community working together to solve problems, advance the science of land reclamation and make the environment better for everyone."

Jarrett spent the afternoon touring sites where Arch Coal is working with West Virginia University's National Mine Land Reclamation Center (NMLRC) to test the growth potential of different soils on 14 experimental plots. The study will require nearly 21,000 seedlings of red, white, black and pin oak, white ash, Norway spruce, sugar maple, black walnut and white pine.

The OSM director pitched in to help students from Riverside High School in Quincy, WV, plant trees at Arch's "Classroom on the Mountain." The pioneering cooperative program gives nearly 100 students hands-on experience in flora and fauna cultivation. Students began by planting trees, but expanded the program themselves by asking that it include hatching, rearing and releasing native game birds like quail and grouse on the reclaimed mine land.

"We're enthusiastic about the reforestation research underway," says Jeff Bitzer, president of Arch's Catenary Coal and general manager of Samples mine. "We appreciate OSM's recognition and support of our ongoing efforts to improve mine reclamation practices."

Jarrett told participants at the Earth Day activities that since the day he took over as OSM director he's looked for ways to promote more reforestation on reclaimed mine sites.

"Reforestation is a win-win-win scenario," he said. "Coal companies get the economic benefits of renewable timber resources; communities get more jobs, more tax revenue, more opportunities for recreation and tourism; everyone gets the environmental benefits of reduced carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, improved water quality, plant and animal habitat and reduced soil erosion. There's just no way to go wrong planting trees."

Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton has directed her agencies, including OSM, to promote a new environmentalism, one built upon partnerships and cooperative conservation, said Jarrett, and to conduct business using her "4Cs": Communication, Consultation and Cooperation in the service of Conservation.

"When I look at this project and what's been accomplished here," he said. "I don't think I could name a better example of the kind of results that can be gained with that spirit of stewardship and new environmentalism."