

news from ... Congressman Nick Rahall

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House Passes Rahall Remining and Acidified Waters Provisions

Washington, D.C. -- The House of Representatives today passed pro-environment legislation containing Fourth District Congressman Nick Rahall's provisions aimed at providing the coal industry with an incentive to remine and reclaim abandoned coal mine lands, and to provide funding to fight acid mine drainage problems.

Speaking on the floor of the House in support of the amendment, Rep. Rahall said, "Today, there is an excess of one million acres of abandoned coal mine lands with the vast majority located in the Appalachian Region. While the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 created an abandoned mine reclamation program to address the problems created by coal mines left in an orphaned state prior to the enactment of the 1977 statute, it is expected that this program -- funded by a tax assessed on the coal industry -- will resolve only about 20 percent of the problem areas."

"As such, from a water quality perspective, many of these abandoned mine lands are currently discharging pollutants and will continue to do so to eternity unless the coal industry can be enticed into remining, and as such, reclaim these lands," Rep. Rahall pointed out.

Rep. Rahall's provision, adopted by the House as an amendment to the Water Quality Renewal Act passed by the House today, would modify the national requirements for the coal mining industry for certain pollutants contained in abandoned mine effluents where a coal operator intends to remine an abandoned coal mine site. These requirements would be applied on a case-by-case basis, but must still meet state water quality standards.

Rep. Rahall also announced that the House had adopted another amendment he authored which would authorize a state grant program of \$25 Million per year for five fiscal years to be used by the states to mitigate the harmful effects of acid deposition or acid mine drainage on surface waters. "Acid mine drainage is perhaps the main environmental problem in West Virginia and armed with proper funding, the state will be able to do battle against this detriment to our water quality," Rep. Rahall said. "It is my intention that grants made under this program to mitigate the affects of acid rain drainage on streams, rivers, and lakes be directed at those sites where the cause of acidity is from abandoned coal mine sites."

It should be noted that the amendment seeks to mitigate the harmful effects of acidity on surface waters, and, in this regard, funding may be used to address the source of the acidic discharge at the abandoned mine site, or, directed at the impacted stream or lake itself.

The Water Quality Renewal Act will now go to the Senate for consideration.

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