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PROPOSED FEDERAL BUDGET WOULD GROW COALFIELD ECONOMY BY  
RECLAIMING MORE ABANDONED MINES

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Today the White House released its proposed FY2016 budget, which includes a package of policy proposals called the POWER Plus (“POWER+”) Plan. Among the proposed changes is a **release of \$1 billion from the unappropriated balance of the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund to support reclamation work in the coalfields.**

“Appalachian Citizens’ Law Center is glad to see that attention is being given to the opportunities that the Abandoned Mine Land program presents for coalfield communities and displaced workers. Reinvesting funds into Central Appalachia could simultaneously address the legacy costs of coal extraction and provide new, needed job opportunities,” expressed Appalachian Citizens’ Law Center Director Steve Sanders.

At this point, few details exist about the proposal other than it would spend \$200 million per year over five years in states and tribes, based on economic factors such as unemployment rates, the existing inventory of land and water that needs to be reclaimed, and the potential for reclamation to be linked to job-creating economic development.

The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE)—the federal agency that administers the AML program—will seek input from stakeholders including states and tribes as it finalizes this proposal. “Appalachian Citizens’ Law Center looks forward to being involved in this process and hopes that the Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR) Strategy Summit on February 16, 2015 will be a forum at which coalfield citizens can provide input into how the AML program can leverage investment in the region,” said Eric Dixon, an Appalachian Transition Fellow at Appalachian Citizens’ Law Center.

“Since 1977, the AML program has cleaned up thousands of hazards to people and the environment throughout the coalfields. From 2012 to 2013, Central Appalachia lost over 6,000 coal-mining jobs. Unemployed miners and others have the skills necessary to do reclamation work on AML projects. More AML funding in this region, like the increase proposed today, could put miners back to work and lay a foundation for economic growth in the region,” said Evan Smith, a staff attorney at Appalachian Citizens’ Law Center.

–FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE IN THE APPALACHIAN COALFIELDS–

The Appalachian Citizens' Law Center and The Alliance for Appalachia have partnered on a research project that is exploring how the federal AML program might be improved. Our team is currently surveying state and tribal AML programs to better understand how some projects are leveraging AML funds for economic development and ecological restoration. We plan to release our report on the AML program in early March.

For more information about the AML program and ideas for how it could be used in Central Appalachia, please contact Eric Dixon at 865-202-8688 ([eric@appalachianlawcenter.org](mailto:eric@appalachianlawcenter.org)), Evan Smith at 606-205-8753 ([evan@appalachianlawcenter.org](mailto:evan@appalachianlawcenter.org)), or Steve Sanders at 859-245-0949 (<mailto:steve@appalachianlawcenter.org>).