

## Northeast Natural Energy will fund operations and maintenance of Richard Mine treatment plant on Deckers Creek

by [David Beard, The Dominion Post](#)

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[Photos: David Beard/The Dominion Post](#)

MORGANTOWN – Local natural gas producer Northeast Natural Energy has joined the effort to clean up the toxic drainage pouring from the Richard Mine into Deckers Creek.

Northeast announced that it has partnered with the state Department of Environmental Protection to cover the annual cost of operating and maintaining the mine drainage treatment plant once the plant is complete.



The foot of the bridge

lands near the mine portal.

Northeast President Mike John credited the work of all those who've paved the way for this project to become reality. "A lot of folks have worked on this project and a lot of good work has happened," he said. "It's a group effort. We're proud to be a part of it."

He credited the state State Department of Environmental Protection and DEP's Abandoned Mine Lands office, along with the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service and WVU, which helped get people to the table to move the project forward.

"The real celebration will come not just when the project's up and running but when the water's clean again," John said. "We're excited about being part of it but we're more excited about life being restored to the Deckers Creek watershed."

Asked what inspired Northeast's involvement, John said, "A big part of what our company's about is we're from here, and our employees live here." And they enjoy recreation on the creek. "They're passionate about trying to help clean up Deckers Creek." They gave the incentive and propelled the idea forward.



Right now, a bridge is under construction spanning the creek from W.Va. 7 in Richard – just outside Morgantown – to a spot near the mine portal where the mine drains into the creek. The bridge will provide access to the treatment plant.

The bridge is tentatively scheduled to be complete by June 10, DEP told The Dominion Post. The awarded bid amount was \$998,118.21, with the funds coming from coal industry fees paid to the U.S. Office of Surface Mining Abandoned Mine Lands fund. Construction of the treatment facility is scheduled to begin in October and treatment operations are projected to begin in 2022.

The treatment system will use high calcium hydrated lime, which will be added to the acid mine drainage within the facility, DEP said. After mixing, the metals will separate from the water in clarifiers. The clean water then will be discharged back into Deckers Creek.

DEP was unable to provide updated cost projections for plant construction in time for this report but had previously told The Dominion Post it would fall in the \$2.5 million to \$3.5 million range.

John said the annual operations and maintenance cost will be about \$200,000 to \$250,000.

As previously reported, NRCS is partnering with DEP for the treatment plant project. Paving the way was a \$3.375 million NRCS allotment provided in 2017 — not a grant, but a type of fund administered through agreements with other government entities.



NRCS is providing funds for everything related to construction except the land purchase. DEP bought 7 acres around the discharge site for \$1.1 million to allow for construction.

Deckers Creek is about 24.6 miles long. The defunct Richard Mine is the single largest source of acid mine drainage into the creek: 200 gallons per minute.

Each year, that contaminated flow puts into the creek 730,500 pounds of acidity, 140,000 pounds of iron, 59,000 pounds of aluminum and 3,200 pounds of manganese and renders the last 5.3 miles of the creek – from the village of Richard to its mouth at the Monongahela River – essentially dead.

All involved believe cleaning the last leg of the creek will not only restore life to it, but will also boost recreation, the local economy and the general quality of life in the area.