AmeriCorps OSM/VISTA Quarterly Report

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This quarter marks the end of my service as an OSM/VISTA. I believe the biggest highlight is the sense of accomplishment I feel about the past twelve months. My experience here was personally fulfilling, and I'm ready to move on. Besides that, as I look over the work plan I received one year ago, I see that I've done what I came to do and that that my work here is done. I'm also confident that the programs and community services I started, as well as this organization as a whole, will continue smoothly once I'm gone.

AMD Monitoring

I continued development of *Datashed*, an Internet repository for water sampling data. The database, which I helped design, has been open to the public for a few months now, and the only remaining changes are minor enhancements to improve users' experiences.

WPCAMR recognizes that passive AMD treatment technologies are still not fully understood, even by the so-called "experts." This mystery surrounding their operation makes is exceedingly difficult for watershed groups of volunteers to know what to watch for to evaluate the success or failure of a system. In response, I've been coordinating a multi-agency group, which will establish a guide for watershed groups and others who maintain passive treatment systems. This guide will make recommendations of appropriate chemical analyses for various situations, as well as prescribe sampling frequencies and a balance of field and laboratory tests.

Community Outreach and Volunteer Engagement

In April I helped children (and some adults!) tie-dye T-shirts using iron solids from abandoned mine drainage as part of WPCAMR's *Ask Me About Pyrite* curriculum. As we colored their T-shirts orange, we discussed the source of the iron and the pollution that stains their streams the same color.

WPCAMR's weekly e-mail publication *Abandoned Mine Posts*, which I got started in September 2006, now provides over 360 watershed members, community volunteers, and government agencies with grant announcements, water monitoring tips, informational updates about legislation and existing laws, and other helpful tools. This quarter, I handed over copyediting and distribution duties of the newsletter to Andy. As he is full-time staff that will likely be with WPCAMR longer than any VISTA, Andy's future role in *Abandoned Mine Posts* will ensure the newsletter's sustainability. I also made a video guide to sending out the e-mails for future reference.

Finally, I was instrumental in the creation and distribution of a press release announcing May 2007 as Pennsylvania's *Watershed Awareness Month*, and I helped Andy as he issued a second press release announcing a series of public town-hall meetings throughout Pennsylvania to discuss the future of abandoned mine reclamation funding in the Commonwealth.

Sustainability

The sustainability of my projects is always at the front of my mind. I believe one way to do this is to keep a written record of processes, actions, and considerations. For example, the FACTS Program Website explicitly describes how the grant works, who is eligible, etc. Furthermore, since the water monitoring programs through the FACTS Program is managed by the Datashed website, I created a "Help" section for the website, giving instructions for watershed volunteers to manage their sampling programs and for laboratories to upload analysis results to the database. Since virtually every aspect of the FACTS program is now documented online, it should be easy for the next person who comes on board to administrate the program to figure out how it works.

Computer-support projects that I established over the past year for *Eastern Coal Regional Roundtable*, the *Appalachian Coal Country Watershed Team*, and *WPCAMR* have all been operating smoothly without my intervention for at least two months now—with some projects being sustainable since August 2006.

Finally, I'm finding that some of my accomplishments will be sustainable not only for WPCAMR and partnering organizations, but also for myself and my future. For example
- Computer-based organizational tools—such as a database for contacts and various website scripts—that I made or enhanced are so useful that I've made personal copies and am sure I'll adapt them for use in future jobs or organizations of which I become a part.
- The sheer knowledge about chemistry and mining-related problems I acquired as an OSM/VISTA in Appalachia is incredible. I currently have tentative plans to head to other regions of the world with the same coal-mining history and acid mine drainage (e.g. Scotland or Colorado), and if these plans pan out, I will definitely get involved in remediation efforts, putting this new knowledge and experience to good use.

Other Accomplishments

I created a AmeriCorps VISTA work plan for my successor, as-yet unnamed. This work plan will guide the new VISTA in securing financial resources for WPCAMR, organizing water monitoring throughout Pennsylvania, and enhancing community awareness of abandoned mine problems.