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GROUP WRONG ABOUT WITHDRAWAL OF VALLEY FILL PERMIT

In its Jan. 22 commentary, the Kentucky Waterways Alliance says the Army Corps of Engineers has been issuing illegal valley fill permits in Kentucky, pointing to the Corps' recent withdrawal of the permit issued to International Coal Group's Hazard subsidiary for its Thunder Ridge mining operation to validate its point.

Valley fill permits are not illegal in Kentucky. The withdrawal of ICG Hazard's permit by the Corps was not an admission of its illegality, but simply a compromise to defer litigation. We are not disappointed that the Corps chose to undertake further review of the permit in light of claims filed by anti-mining extremists.

The alliance asserts that most surface-mining sites have no post-mining uses. In the Hazard area alone, hospitals, shopping centers, an airport and new residential areas have been constructed on reclaimed mine surfaces. The new Knott County Sportsplex, sponsored in part by ICG, is built on a reclaimed mine site. The best places to see elk are on reclaimed lands.

The alliance's description of streams destroyed by infill play to the emotions of those who imagine a gently flowing stream where people once fished and swam being filled by rock and dirt. In fact, valley fill streams are steep ditches cut into mountainsides that carry water only during rainfall.

Further, coal mining operations have always been subject to stringent water-quality requirements.

The facts will ultimately support our case for responsible surface mining, not unfounded generalizations of special interest groups.

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