

# The Council for the Conservation of Migratory Birds 2011 Presidential Migratory Bird Federal Stewardship Award

## Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative

### *Council for the Conservation of Migratory Birds*

The Council for the Conservation of Migratory Birds, with members of federal agencies, works to ensure that each agency to which Executive Order 13186, “Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds” is applicable, successfully implements its migratory bird conservation responsibilities, as described in the Executive Order. The Presidential Migratory Bird Federal Stewardship Award will annually recognize a project or action conducted by or in partnership with a Federal agency that meets the intent and spirit of the Executive Order by focusing on migratory bird conservation. This is the first of the annual awards.

### *Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative*



photo, Matthew Shumar

Cerulean Warbler

Created in 2004, the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative (ARRI) is local, regional, national, and international in scale, and focuses on restoring forests where deforestation by surface coal mining has occurred.

This coincides largely within the Appalachian breeding range of neo-tropical migratory song birds, notably the Cerulean Warbler.

The ARRI established a Core Team with representatives from the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSM) and regulatory authorities of the seven coal states in the Appalachian region. Additionally, the ARRI Science Team was created consisting of 33 scientists representing 17 universities and institutions across the country.

Prior to ARRI, because of the past regulatory emphasis on achieving soil stability and controlling sedimentation, reclamation of coal mine sites in the Appalachian region resulted in dense grasslands with few or no trees. These mine sites may end up as abandoned grasslands with little potential for returning to forest because of excessive compaction of the soil surface and competition from the dense ground cover. The resulting forest fragmentation has



Photo, Richard Davis

The Initiative's goals include planting more high-value hardwood trees on reclaimed coal mines

environmental impacts, reduces carbon sequestration, limits the land's economic value, and reduces habitat for neo-tropical migratory songbirds like the Cerulean Warbler that depend on intact interior forests.

ARRI's goals are to plant more high-value hardwood trees on reclaimed coal mines; increase the survival and growth rates of the planted trees; and expedite the establishment of forest habitat through natural succession. ARRI is working to change the preference of the surface mining industry to forestry over grasslands as the post-mining land use.

Under ARRI's leadership, the surface mining industry has planted about 70 million trees on about 103,000 acres of mined land that might have otherwise been reclaimed to grasslands and would have contributed to more forest fragmentation in the mixed-mesophytic forest of Appalachia.

The benefits of reforestation provide an area of common ground for industry and the conservation and environmental communities. Forests play a critical role in moderating temperatures, controlling runoff, improving water quality, sequestering carbon, and providing biological diversity. Abandoned mine lands provide tremendous opportunities to restore a diversity of habitats (such as mature forests, early successional forests, shrublands, wetlands, grasslands) across the Appalachian landscape that could support populations of numerous priority species.



Reclaimed mine land

## ***ARRI Coal-Coffee-Cerulean Summit***

Because a remarkable overlap occurs between Cerulean Warbler habitat and existing areas of Appalachian coal and Andean coffee production, ARRI partners organized a summit for coal industry representatives from Appalachia, Colombian coffee officials, and Cerulean Warbler conservationists to discuss proactive conservation opportunities for Cerulean Warblers across their range in North and South America. The primary purpose of the summit was to explore the possible partnership that links the two industries with the Cerulean Warbler Technical Group (CWTG).

Participants discussed ways to reverse population declines of Cerulean Warblers, thereby reducing the likelihood of listing the species under the Endangered Species Act in the future. Summit participants recognized that proactive, strategic, and coordinated conservation/restoration of forested habitat on breeding and non-breeding grounds would improve or maintain ecosystem functions in key areas for Cerulean Warblers.



Colombian students participating in migratory bird festival.

The results of the ARRI Coal-Coffee-Cerulean summit directly benefit Cerulean Warblers and other migratory birds by raising awareness and concern for the results of deforestation in key industry players on both continents. ARRI is also partnering with

the South American bird conservation group ProAves and CWTG in a pen-pal program linking high school students from the coal fields of the Appalachian Mountains with students of the coffee region in the Andean Mountains of Colombia, South America.

### ***Partnerships***

Partnerships are critical in the effort to disseminate information about the benefits of restoring healthy and productive forests on surface mines for migratory birds. An active partnership between the USFWS

and ARRI was established with the signing of the Statement of Mutual Intent by the Directors of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and OSM in November 2007.

Major ARRI partners include notable bird conservation organizations such as the American Bird Conservancy, the Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture, the Cerulean Warbler Technical Group, the Golden-Winged Warbler Working Group, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, The Trust for Wildlife, and many other conservation and environmental groups and associations. ARRI serves as the vehicle by which the bird conservation community participate with OSM, the state regulatory authorities, the mining industry, landowners, and academia regarding bird conservation practices and the effects of mining and reclamation on migratory birds. The positive results of ARRI's actions in reducing existing and potential adverse impacts to migratory birds and their habitats have been nationally and internationally recognized.

Twenty-two co-partners associated with the award include: Indiana University of Pennsylvania; Kentucky Department for Natural Resources; Maryland Department of Environment; Ohio Department of Natural Resources; Ohio University; Ohio State University; Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection; Pennsylvania State University; Purdue University; Southern Illinois University; The American Chestnut Foundation; United States Forest Service; United States Geological Survey; University of Kentucky; University of Maryland; University of Tennessee; Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy; Virginia Polytechnic Institute; West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection; West Virginia University; West Virginia State University; and Wilkes University.



For more information about the **Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative** visit:

<http://arri.osmre.gov/>