

Bids on Banning Mine No. 4 reclamation come in \$4.7M higher than expected

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The state plans to review the proposed Banning Mine No. 4 reclamation project in Rostraver after the lowest bid on the job to eliminate environmental and safety hazards at the closed mine came in about \$4.7 million higher than expected, a spokesman said Monday.

Alex E. Paris Contracting Co. Inc. of Atlasburg in Washington County, submitted a bid of \$16,752,354 for a project that the Department of Environmental Protection had estimated would cost about \$12 million, according to the project specifications. The bids were opened last week.

"There will be discussions to determine what course of action will be taken on this project. It's too early to speculate on what our options will be," said John Poister, a DEP spokesman in Pittsburgh.

Cast & Baker Corp. of North Strabane submitted a bid of \$17,640,701, and HRI Inc. of State College bid \$17,884,559.

The federal government's Abandoned Mine Lands reclamation fund is financing the project. Money for that fund is generated by a tax on each ton of coal mined.

The project is intended to stabilize three impoundment ponds that hold sludge, coal refuse slurry and acid mine drainage, including one

pond designated as a low-hazard dam with near-vertical slopes. Once stabilized, the ponds will be covered and graded.

The largest of the impoundment ponds, which is atop a coal refuse pile, is considered a low-hazard dam, with a “very dangerous wall” at least 100 feet high, Poister said. That pond contains sludge from an acid mine drainage treatment plant along the Youghiogheny River, while the other two on the refuse pile hold coal refuse slurry, according to the project description.

The coal refuse piles rise about 100 yards from the Great Allegheny Passage, the popular hiking and biking trail that links Pittsburgh with Cumberland, Md. The mine is about a mile south of the West Newton trail access site.

Prior to the bid opening, Poister said state officials hope the project will begin in late summer. The work is to be completed in less than 2 ½ years.

The Banning Mine had been operated by the former Republic Steel, which closed it in 1982 and sealed it. LTV Steel Corp. bought Republic Steel in 1984 and bored holes into the mine to dispose of the sludge until 1990, the state said.

Remediating the site has been a priority among the state's abandoned mine projects, Poister said.

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Large, abandoned mine to be reclaimed in Rostraver

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<https://www.observer-reporter.com/news/2018/jun/05/large-abandoned-mine-to-be-reclaimed-in-rostraver/>

ROSTRAVER – A large row of cattails bordered by wildflowers can be found just beyond mile marker 112 beside a popular hiking and biking trail in Rostraver Township.

Two birdwatchers with binoculars in tow mingled with bicyclists here Monday morning along the Great Allegheny Passage, which hugs the Youghiogheny River near West Newton, Westmoreland County.

And then the view is spoiled by a sprawling abandoned mine waste pile with dangerous cliffs that rise 100 feet or more above the trail at the former Banning No. 4 Mine.

That is about to change under a \$7 million federal grant that has been approved for the reclamation of the 110-acre site that holds three coal refuse slurry ponds reached from Vernon Drive, according to the state Department of Environmental Protection.

The DEP also envisions the creation of a renewable solar energy farm on the property after the reclamation work is completed in July 2021. The project is in the design phase, which should be finished in March 2019.

“The project will eliminate the physical hazards and environmental degradation by regrading the coal refuse embankment/piles to

more stable slopes,” the department stated in the project description.

Republic Steel, a Youngstown, Ohio, corporation that was once the nation’s third largest steel producer, began disposing its coal refuse on the property from its mine in the 1960s. After it ceased operations in 1984, West Newton Coal Logistics received a permit to dispose of waste at the site from a nearby coal preparation plant, and LTV Steel also disposed of sludge in one of the ponds after the mine closed and was sealed in 1982, DEP records show.

One of the ponds is considered to be a low-hazard dam, and it will be blended, strengthened and stabilized by a material that has yet to be determined.

Surface runoff water will be controlled with terraces reinforced with rock.

The project is funded by the U.S. Department of Interior’s Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement.