The Bledsoe Chapter

A struggle to protect homes and water from Strip Mine Damage

SOCM's Bledsoe County Chapter concentrated on two very important and closely related projects during 1986. The first was the winding up of work on the Rock Creek Lands Unsuitable Petition. At the end of 1985, OSM had decided that it would be necessary to prepare a full Enviornmental Impact Statement (EIS) on Rock Creek and proceeded to do so without the required "scoping hearing." Citizens demanded and received the chance for input only to see the Draft EIS published some 3 weeks later with little regard to their input. After intense review and study, contact with professionals in various fields and much individual preparation, the final public hearing on the EIS was held in May and the Final EIS attests to the effectiveness of this hearing. It documents many of the problems with stripmining identified by residents and recommends the designation of parts of the Rock Creek Watershed and controls on the mining of coal seams which require disturbing toxic or acid-producing materials. This is a great victory that will affect how OSM looks at mines throughout the State.

At the same time that these citizens were struggling with the Petition, the active mine at the nearby Rith Energy site was providing the unwanted example of their concerns. After being denied the right to a public hearing by both state and federal officials, citizens travelled to Nashville and Knoxville to confront these officials and began monitoring the activity on the site. Demands from members that OSM verify the operator's information established the fact that the information in the permit application was inaccurate. Area residents learned the regulations and filed several citizens' complaints which resulted in numerous notices of violation, a cease order, and a temporary suspension of the permit. In the face of harassment, blasting damage to homes, and federal officials that seemed unwilling to

> *"We've been harrassed but we want to live here for the rest of our lives and we're willing to hang in for the long haul because we couldn't live with ourselves if we gave up."*
>
> — DAVID HARDEMAN —



Photo by EARL DOTTER

> *"They say they're going to follow all the regulations and their most famous statement is that the land will be better when they get through with it than when they started and God knows that's wrong."*
>
> — WALTER RING —

act on proven problems, members have succeeded in bringing the mine's progress to a halt while OSM (and some professional hydrologists, geologists, etc. for SOCM) reviews the company's attempts to come up with a toxic materials handling plan. This plan will be the first of its kind in Tennessee and much attention has been focused on this important issue due to the determination of the folks in Bledsoe County. While they've suffered considerable loss themselves, they can be proud that their work will improve the situation for many other people in Tennessee.