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**Beyond reclamation and remediation, next steps in a recovered watershed**

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Raccoon Creek Watershed is a 684 square mile watershed that drains 6 counties in southern Ohio. It has nearly 50,000 acres of abandoned underground and surface mines and was designated as Limited Resource Water by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency in the 1990's. Beginning in the late 90's, there has been significant investment in reclamation and remediation throughout the watershed totaling approximately \$20 million dollars over the time period. Projects have included land reclamation of abandoned strip pits and coal processing areas, treatment wetlands, a vertical flow reactor, numerous steel slag leach beds, and a lime doser. In 2017 and 2018, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency performed a comprehensive TMDL study on the watershed, whereas previous studies had only assessed portions of the large watershed. Based on these data, the OEPA has re-designated the stream reaches from the town of Vinton at river mile 40 to the backwaters of the Ohio River as Exceptional Warm Water Habitat, and the remainder of the mainstem of the stream as Warm Water Habitat. The redesignation of the creek has opened new opportunities in the watershed. The transition from Exceptional Warm Water Habitat to Warm Water Habitat is at a low head dam that restricts fish passage. Removal of the low head dam is a priority, but community and landowner resistance will not allow the project to proceed. A recent evaluation suggests that much of the creek and the main tributary, Little Raccoon Creek, would meet state criteria for a state Wild, Scenic, or Recreational River. The new growth in funding for abandoned mine lands opens possibilities for further recovery, economic development through outdoor recreation and education, and engagement with the community on the improvements and continued maintenance of the recovered stream.

**Keywords:** scenic river, recreation, low head dam