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DEP holds conference on mining beneath stream

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WIND RIDGE – An informal public conference held Wednesday on a permit application to longwall mine beneath Polen Run in Richhill Township drew a number of people concerned about how mining in the area would impact feeder streams for the soon-to-be-restored Duke Lake. Polen Run is a feeder stream to Duke Lake and the public conference was held at the Ryerson Station State Park office by the state Department of Environmental Protection to receive comment on a permit application by Consol Energy’s Bailey Mine to longwall beneath it. Terri Davin of the Greene County Watershed Alliance said it was great that Duke Lake is going to be restored. “Now, it’s a whole new situation: the issue is we need water to flow into the reservoir,” she said. Davin said she was concerned with all the mining planned for the area if enough streams remain in place to provide water to fill Duke Lake. The lake is one of the area’s prime fishing and recreational resources, she said. “It has to be made whole again.” The permit application calls for mining two longwall panels beneath Polen Run. The stream is about 6,000 to 7,000 feet long and each of the longwall panels would undermine about 1,500 feet of the stream. The application calls for restoring the stream by installing a geosynthetic clay liner in the stream bed. The liner has been used for other stream restoration work and was successful, said Greg Prentice, DEP compliance manager. The company already began mining in one of the panels but will not be able to mine beneath Polen Run until the permit is approved. DEP has not yet completed its review of the permit application, Prentice said. DEP does takes

into account the impacts of mining on streams in the area and the need for water for Duke Lake, Prentice said. “We do look at the big picture,” he said. Davin and a number of people attending the conference cited examples in which streams that were undermined were not returned to their pre-mining condition. Al Deynzer of Rogersville spoke of an instance in which restoring a stream after mining consisted solely of trucking load after load of water to create a stream flow. “It doesn’t work,” he said. Deynzer said he was against mining beneath Polen Run because it was against the law to impact a stream. “Rules and regulations prohibit it, it’s as simple as that,” he said. Ken Dufalla, president of the Izaak Walton League of Greene County, also said he knew of one stream near Crabapple that was undermined and never restored. He, too, expressed concern about the impact of mining under streams in the area on Duke Lake. “Why spend all that money bringing the lake back when you have no water to fill it?” he said. The company could mine beneath the stream using the room-and-pillar method without damaging the stream, though it would cost more to do, he said. “But it’s all about profit.” Consol earlier received a mining permit to longwall mine the 3,175 acres through which Polen Run flows. That permit prohibited mining beneath Polen Run until a new plan was presented to address its impacts. The permit did allow mining beneath two other streams that are feeder streams to the lake. The permit allowed the company to longwall mine beneath North Fork Dunkard Fork, the main stream flowing into Duke Lake, and room-and-pillar mine beneath Kent Run. In May, Citizens for Coalfield Justice appealed the issuance of the permit for the company to longwall the 3,175 acres to the state Environmental Hearing Board, claiming the mining would damage streams in the area. Veronica Coptis, a community organizer with the group that attended the conference, said Consol has indicated in its permit application that mining beneath Polen Run will result in a loss of stream flow for a significant time. “It is illegal for DEP to issue a permit that causes pollution,” she said. Coptis presented DEP officials with

letters from 276 residents opposed to mining beneath Polen Run. The group also planned to stay at the park office until 7 p.m. Tuesday to accept additional comments from people who could not attend the conference. The conference was held from 1 to 3 p.m.

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