CHEROKEE COUNTY RESTORATION OPTIONS

Past mining and mining-related activities produced large amounts of mine waste. Some of those wastes remain on Cherokee County's lands and in its waters. These mine wastes, which contain metals including cadmium, lead, and zinc, have contaminated surface waters and soils. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) believes that mine wastes have reduced mussel populations, adversely affected plant communities, and had other impacts on local wildlife.

Bullrock pile in Lawton

Bankruptcy settlements from Eagle-Picher Industries, Inc. and LTV Corporation generated approximately $2 million to be used to help protect and restore the area's natural resources. The FWS has identified a number of potential restoration options that could be pursued with these funds (Table 1).

The identified potential restoration options fall broadly into three categories: (1) preserving existing high quality habitats, (2) restoring degraded habitats (*e.g.*, to a high quality prairie or to a warm season grass habitat), and (3) cleaning up sites where mine wastes still remain.

Table 1: Preliminary Restoration Options

No.	Description	Maximum Treatable Area (acres)*
Land-Based Options		
1	**Preserve native prairies**	
2	**Restore degraded areas to:**	
	A. High quality prairie (grass and forb mix)	500-1,000
	B. Warm-season grass habitat	
	C. Cool-season grass habitat	
3	**Address remaining mine wastes**	
	A. Remove and dispose	50-100
	B. Recontour	
	C. Recontour and cap	
Water-Based Options		
1	**Preserve high quality river/lake buffer**	500-1,000
2	**Restore degraded buffers**	
3	**Dredge**	
	A. Dredge waterways	1-2
	B. Dredge Empire Lake	

* Approximate area, assuming that all funds are expended on a single alternative. Available money is not sufficient to pursue all alternatives.

Table 1 provides a general description of the preliminary restoration options identified to date. In addition to the major activities described in this table, fencing may be required to prevent the intrusion of cattle, which can be detrimental to certain restoration projects. Most options would also require ongoing management to ensure the long-term success of the project.

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Native prairie hay meadow

The FWS notes that the restoration options vary greatly in terms of cost and in the types of effects each may have on the environment. Due to insufficient funds, the FWS can not pursue all restoration options.

Table 1 provides estimates of the total area that could be treated with the available bankruptcy proceedings money. For example, available funds are sufficient to dredge perhaps one or two acres of aquatic habitat. Alternately, 500 to 1,000 acres of buffer areas habitat could be preserved or restored as needed.

The goal of the FWS is to identify those projects that represent *the most effective way to use the available funding to enhance Cherokee County's natural environment.* No restoration alternatives have been selected for any restoration project at this time. For some projects, areas to be restored or preserved would either have to be purchased, or an easement for the area would be purchased from willing landowners. The FWS recognizes the need to identify restoration alternatives for specific parcels of land that are acceptable to willing landowners as well as to FWS.

The FWS acknowledges the interest that local residents have in potential restoration efforts that take place in or near their communities. The FWS invites members of the public to provide any comments or suggestions by December 13, 2006 to:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
ATTN: Cherokee County Restoration
Kansas Field Office
2609 Anderson Ave.
Manhattan, KS 66502

For the latest information on Cherokee County natural resource damage assessment and restoration planning activities, please visit:

http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/NRDA/CherCO_KS/CherokeeCounty.htm