Plans for Guard Training Center Defeated

SOCM members in the Southern Plateau, and all over the State, celebrated a major victory this spring when plans for a National Guard Training Center were pronounced dead. The Proposed Center, announced in spring of 1985, was to cover over 100,000 acres of land in seven counties on the southern plateau; would "displace" about 1000 families; would cost over $250 million; and would affect two major recreation areas.

When plans for the training center were announced, SOCM members, experienced from past strip mine fights, moved into action. New members near the site were recruited and two new chapters were formed. Research showed the site was completely unneeded. Plenty of training sites were available elsewhere. National and local media paid attention. Public meetings with the National Guard, state and local officials pressed for information and accountability. A Freedom of Information Act was filed. Federal representatives were left no doubt that their constituents did not want the training center.

Late February, 1986, brought the payoff. Congressman Jim Cooper announced to the press that the Guard Training Center would not be built. He said that the Pentagon "after further consideration" had decided that the center was not needed. Great cheers and relief — almost. . . Newspaper headlines showed General Wallace, of the Tennessee National Guard, refusing to acknowledge the defeat of his brainchild. For almost a month Wallace continued to insist that the center was needed and would be built. He was finally silenced by the weight of media condemnation, calls from Mr. Cooper, and continued public pressure. By late spring it was clear, the National Guard's Spencer Training Range was dead.

$3 Million Released for Reclamation of Abandoned Mine Lands

During 1986, $3 million from state and federal funds were allocated to reclaim dangerous abandoned mine lands in Tennessee. The release of the funds gave victory to year long efforts of the SOCM Stripmine Committee and SOCM members throughout the coalfields, Senator James Sasser, Representative Jim Cooper, Tennessee officials, TVA, Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning, and many others. A $1 million allocation from state funds, and a filibuster by Senator James Sasser during Senate confirmation proceedings for Jed Christensen as director of the U.S. Office of Surface Mining (OSM), provided the final pressure that lead to OSM's agreement to release the discretionary funds. The $2 million federal funds will be released for use in Tennessee in 1986 and 1987.

With the collapse of the Tennessee Stripmine Enforcement Program (primacy) in 1984, the State of Tennessee lost all federal funds for reclaiming abandoned mines — funds collected from a tax on operating coal mines. The withholding of funds was intended by OSM as an incentive to encourage Tennessee primacy. However, the policy was only punishing residents of the coalfields who had to live with the dangers of flooding, refuse pile fires, crumbling highwalls and deepmine portals remaining from unreclaimed orphan mines.

Although $3 million is a small sum for reclamation of the many abandoned minelands in Tennessee, it is a start. The sum will partially reclaim problem areas at 16 orphan area mines in Tennessee. SOCM members plan to continue work for release of additional money for fiscal 1988.

"Ours is really a David and Goliath story. We started out as three housewives around a coffee table against the entire Tennessee National Guard. Before it was over, we were part of a coalition of 20 organizations in several states. There were times I thought the General and his power and money would win. But we won!"

— LAURA DEES —