

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE-
CONTACT KEN MCFADYEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
BLUE RIDGE CROSSROADS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
PLEASE CALL 233-1313 WITH QUESTIONS

**American Electric Power Certifies Wildwood Commerce Park
through its Quality Site Program**

Wildwood Commerce Park has earned site certification through American Electric Power's Quality Sites Program. McCallum Sweeney Consulting, based in Greenville, South Carolina, conducted the third-party site certification assessment.

Located at Exit 19 of Interstate-77 in Carroll County, in southwestern Virginia, Wildwood Commerce Park is a 273-acre regional industrial park with graded 100- and 25- acre sites with all essential utilities in-place. The park offers a strategic location, a skilled workforce, and a favorable cost of doing business, all in a right-to-work state. Wildwood also offers prospective companies ideal interstate access, natural gas availability, and current available water capacity in excess of one million gallons per day.

The Blue Ridge Crossroads Economic Development Authority (BRCEDA) owns and manages the 273 acres composing Wildwood on behalf of the localities of Carroll County, the City of Galax, and Grayson County.

"Receiving site certification for Wildwood Commerce Park is yet another demonstration of our local commitment to regional economic development and it is a true accomplishment for BRCEDA, our localities, and our partners that have made Wildwood possible," stated C.M. Mitchell, mayor of Galax and chair of BRCEDA.

John Smolak, with Appalachian Power, contacted BRCEDA's executive director, Ken McFadyen, in 2014 to determine whether Wildwood was ready to pursue site certification. BRCEDA, along with its member localities of Carroll County, the City of Galax, and Grayson County, purchased the property in two phases, in 2011 and 2013.

"Early on, we felt Wildwood Commerce Park was a good candidate for the certification process," says John Smolak, Director of Economic and Business Development for Appalachian Power in Virginia. "A great deal of due diligence was complete and the first phase of site development was nearing completion. Plus, we had confidence that BRCEDA could complete the work required."

Beginning in 2011, BRCEDA initiated the design and construction of utilities with significant grant and private investments from the Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission, Appalachian Power, Appalachian Regional Commission, Virginia Department of Transportation, and local developers Branscome-Turman, LLC. Wildwood is designated as one of seven "megasites" in the Virginia Tobacco Region.

"BRCEDA and the localities are to be congratulated for reaching this milestone in the development and marketing of Wildwood Commerce Park. The Virginia Tobacco Commission has invested just over \$14 million to acquire the property and to develop the site at Wildwood and we are looking forward to the marketing attention that site certification brings," commented Senator Bill Carrico, whose district includes Grayson County and who has championed Wildwood through his seat on the Virginia Tobacco Commission.

"Companies searching for a location to expand operations generally evaluate prospective sites according to three factors," says Lindsey Myers, Senior Consultant and

director of McCallum Sweeney's Site Readiness Programs. "Time, cost, and risk. How long will it take for a company to become operational at a particular site? How much will it cost to develop a facility at the site? And, what risks does a site have and has the locality addressed these risks, including environmental or utility capacity limitations? Site certification addresses each of these factors."

The process of certifying Wildwood involved three phases of increasing levels of detail and thoroughness. BRCEDA prepared a four-inch binder, with many pages printed front and back, that addressed items including topographical surveys, environmental assessments, wetlands assessment, protected species assessments, archaeological surveys, deed and ownership verification, and geotechnical and seismic investigations.

"We prepared our submittals for site certification in much the same way that we respond to companies considering Wildwood as an expansion location," says McFadyen. "Site certification gauges the level of readiness for development that an industrial site possesses. As we progressed through the process with AEP and McCallum Sweeney, we learned that Wildwood is ready to meet prospective companies' expectations. We will still demonstrate to a company that Wildwood is ready and site certification is clearly an indication of Wildwood's state of readiness."

Prospective business activity at Wildwood has increased four-fold in 2015, compared to activity between 2011 and 2014, as a result of completing utilities and site development activities. BRCEDA is closely aligned with the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) to promote Wildwood to prospective companies and consultants who assist companies with selecting sites for expansion. Most recently,

McFadyen traveled to Texas with VEDP to meet with companies, industrial realtors, and site selection consultants.

“Companies with capital intensive investments designed to significantly improve productivity, capacity and competitive position seek to minimize site development risk because of tight implementation timeframes,” says Mike Lehmkuhler, VEDP’s Vice President of Business Attraction. “Reliable property control, substantial pre-existing infrastructure, appropriate workforce solutions, and well-documented site development plans are essential ingredients for successful implementation of their plans. Unique real estate assets need strong action plans to attract and win these deals.”

BRCEDA formed in 2007 to provide the leadership for economic development efforts that would benefit the Twin County region. Over the last nine years, BRCEDA has established the most successful Small Business Development Center in Virginia, leading to the creation of over 200 new businesses. Before the creation of a stand-alone Wired Road Broadband Authority, BRCEDA led the effort to create Virginia’s first community-owned, open access regional broadband network. BRCEDA comprises of Carroll County, the City of Galax, and Grayson County and its offices are based at the Crossroads Institute in Galax.

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