



U.S. Office of Surface Mining **News Release**



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Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement Gives Top Honors for Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation

The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSM) today recognizes six state agencies for excellence in reclaiming abandoned mines.

Abandoned Mine Land programs in Alaska, Colorado, Iowa, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas will receive the 2009 Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Awards at a banquet hosted by the National Association of Abandoned Mine Land Professionals in Rogers, Arkansas, this evening.

“OSM is proud to recognize this year’s winners for their achievements in reclaiming abandoned mines,” said Glenda Owens, Acting Director of OSM, who will present the awards to this year’s winners. “The award-winning projects show what state programs can accomplish when reclamation of abandoned mines is done well,” she added.

“It’s encouraging to see the high-quality work demonstrated by the winners of the 2009 Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Awards,” said Wilma Lewis, Assistant Interior Secretary, Land and Minerals Management. “Reclaiming abandoned mines helps communities affected by past mining by improving local water quality and eliminating safety hazards, among other benefits,” she added.

Begun in 1992, OSM’s Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Awards recognize outstanding abandoned mine land reclamation in the United States and showcase exemplary reclamation techniques. Abandoned Mine Land (AML) projects funded wholly or in part and completed by approved state or tribal programs are eligible. The awards encompass all types of reclamation, including coal, non-coal, and emergency projects. A panel of judges, composed of directors of state reclamation programs and certain OSM managers, vote to determine the winners.

The winners of the 2009 Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Awards are:

The National Award

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation
West Suscon Abandoned Mine Reclamation
Jenkins Township, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania

Scarred with features such as dangerous highwalls, open mine shafts, and acid mine drainage that degraded local water quality, the West Suscon project was a typical example of an abandoned coal mine. Challenges at this site in northeastern Pennsylvania included eliminating health and safety problems

associated with the highwalls, controlling drainage, and preventing access to the abandoned underground mine openings while protecting the area's bat population.

Operators graded the entire area so that it would blend in with the surrounding landscape and be developed in the future. The area is now the site of an office park with several commercial tenants.

Small Project Awards

In 2009, OSM is giving two Small Project Awards, which are reserved for states or tribes receiving fewer than \$6 million annually in AML funding and for projects receiving under \$1 million.

Iowa Abandoned Mine Land Program, Mines and Minerals Bureau

Waal West Reclamation Project, Section II

Mahaska County, Iowa

Mined in the 1960's, this abandoned mine site in southeastern Iowa was mostly barren spoil piles with sparse vegetation. It consisted of a sediment-clogged stream, a hazardous water body, and industrial and residential waste.

The State of Iowa, working in concert with local government and private citizens, succeeded in establishing a wetland and enhancing an existing wetland. An embankment created on the downstream end of the existing wetland allows water to be retained in the area for a longer time, thereby improving the quality of the entire wetland area and pond.

Alaska Department of Natural Resources, AML Program

Suntrana Tipple AML Project

Healy Creek Valley, Alaska

By early 2000, the Suntrana Tipple project site was littered with power transformers, partially filled diesel storage tanks, and buildings containing trash and hazardous materials. Flash floods, high winds, and other factors created special risks and unknown expense factors for the contractors working at the site.

The project demolished all onsite buildings and mitigated the contaminants — hydrocarbons and polychlorinated biphenyls, a type of persistent organic pollutant — found on the site. The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation subsequently issued a clearance for this site.

The Appalachian Regional Award

Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mineral Resources Management

Belden AMD Reclamation Project

Carroll County, Ohio

Almost two centuries of coal mining have created acid mine drainage from several abandoned mines throughout the Huff Run watershed in southeastern Ohio.

The Belden site is one of eight stream reaches along Huff Run that the Ohio Department of Natural Resources has identified for eventual reclamation. Work on the Belden site has restored about 4,000 feet of surface waters affecting two streams in the Huff Run watershed. This restoration primarily benefits aquatic insects and native fish such as darters and catfish, which once occurred throughout the Huff Run watershed. Early results have been promising: quantities of iron and aluminum, as measured

by discharges from the project's retention pond earlier this year, have decreased from seven pounds per day to less than a pound per day.

Restoration projects such as Belden will ultimately reduce the water treatment costs that local municipalities face each year.

The Mid-Continent Regional Award

Railroad Commission of Texas, Surface Mining and Reclamation Division

Mabel New-Superior AML Reclamation Project

Live Oak County, Texas

The Mabel New-Superior mine is an open-pit uranium mine site located in south Texas. Mined in the 1960's, the abandoned pit had over 11,000 linear feet of highwalls. Additionally, abandoned spoil and low-quality ore adjacent to the pits presented a radiation hazard.

Contractors eliminated the dangerous highwalls, graded the site to a stable topography, and buried the radioactive materials in the pit bottom. As a result, post-reclamation radiation readings are lower than estimated pre-clean-up readings in about 70 percent of the project area.

The Western Regional Award

Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety, Inactive Reclamation Program

Millsap Creek Tailings Reclamation Project

Teller County, Colorado

In the late 1990's, forty-five acres of sandy refuse material from an abandoned gold mine were washing down Millsap Creek in central Colorado, causing severe sedimentation into a tributary of the Arkansas River. The State of Colorado developed partnerships with the Bureau of Land Management, local government, private landowners, as well as other industry and local government partners. Over a six-year period, The Reclamation Division was able to enlist the necessary assistance and financing to reclaim the Millsap Creek Tailings.

Reclamation work included excavation and re-grading 320,000 cubic yards of tailings, hauling and spreading 60,000 cubic yards of cover soils and rock to stabilize the reconfigured site, and mulching, seeding, and revegetating the reclaimed area.

OSM carries out the requirements of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 in cooperation with states and Indian tribes. OSM's objectives are to ensure that coal mining activities are conducted in a manner that protects citizens and the environment during mining, to ensure that the land is restored to beneficial use after mining, and to mitigate the effects of past mining by aggressively pursuing reclamation of abandoned mines, with a particular emphasis on those areas impacted by coal mining.