



Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement

Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Awards Nomination Form & Instructions

About the Awards

In 1992, OSMRE launched the annual Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Awards program to recognize outstanding reclamation techniques and projects. The program mirrors the objectives of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 to ensure that legacy coal mines are reclaimed and that active mine lands are restored to beneficial use.

Eligibility

AML projects completed by an approved state or Tribal program are eligible for an award, including coal, non-coal, high-priority and emergency projects. One project may be submitted by an approved state or Tribal program and must have been completed within two years of the call for nominations.

Abandoned mine reclamation completed by citizen groups or other non-state/non-Tribal organizations are not eligible for these awards.

Award Categories

OSMRE presents five awards each year. A **National Award** is presented to the state or Tribe with the highest scored reclamation project. A **Small Project Award** is presented to the state or Tribe that receives less than \$6 million annually in AML funding and completes a project costing less than \$1 million. The **Appalachian States Award** is presented to the state or Tribe with the best project within that region. The **Interior States Award** is presented to the state or Tribe with the best project within that region. The **Western States and Tribes Award** is presented to the state or Tribe with the best project within that region.

Scoring Nominations

Each nomination is scored by a pool of judges recruited from OSMRE approved state and Tribal AML programs. A nomination has the potential to earn 100-points from each judge. Scores for each nomination are averaged to get the final score for each nomination. If there is a tie in any of the award categories, a pool of OSMRE judges reevaluate and rescore the tied projects. Nominations are evaluated in the following categories:

- Innovative use of Technology.
- Difficulty of achieving reclamation under existing conditions.
- On-site effectiveness.
- Funding.
- Benefits to the community.
- Exceeding the spirit and intent of SMRCA.

Deadline & How to Submit Your Nomination

Submit nominations by 11:59 p.m. ET, on May 10, 2026 to awards@osmre.gov.

Questions?

For more information, email awards@osmre.gov.





Nomination Form

Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Awards

Date Submitted: 5/8/26

Nominator's Contact Information

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Award Category (You may check more than one category.)



Appalachian States Award



Interior States Award



Western States and Tribes



Small Project Award



National Award

Project Information

AML Program: Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection - Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation

Project Name: Forest City East - Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission Access

Project Location: Susquehanna & Wayne Counties, PA (PA004271 & PA004272)

Project Start Date: 11/20/22

Project End Date: 4/3/24

Project Estimate: \$3,094,445.00

Actual Cost: \$3,352,259.25

Funding Type(s): AMLER Program and the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Trust Fund (SMCRA)

Organizations responsible for reclamation:

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection - Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation // OSMRE
Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission
Linde Corporation
Forest City Partnership, LLC
Rail Trail Council of Northeast Pennsylvania
Pennsylvania American Water Company
Forest City Borough

Project Narrative

Executive Summary: Write a high-level overview of the nominated project that addresses organizations responsible for reclamation, project location, start and completion dates, cost, reclaimed features, and benefits to the community.

The Forest City East - Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission Access Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation project reclaimed over 50 acres of abandoned mine land (AML), primarily consisting of Dangerous Piles and Embankments (DPE) and Gob Piles (Gob) that were actively impairing the adjacent Lackawanna River, a high quality naturally reproducing trout stream. The project preserved 4 acres of healthy wetlands, and created 0.8 acres of new wetlands. The project also revegetated over 38 acres of AML and planted 2,100 native tree seedlings across the reclamation area. The project area is privately owned, however following the project, the owner has opened the land to the public to enjoy for recreation and access the river for fishing and launching of non-motorized watercraft. There is also expressed interest by the PA Fish & Boat Commission to secure a long-term agreement with the property owner to ensure access to the river and boat launch is preserved for the public to enjoy.

The project was competitively bid and awarded to the lowest bidder, Earthmovers Unlimited, Inc. from Kylertown, PA. The contract was awarded on November 1, 2022, with a Notice-to-Proceed date of November 10, 2022. Approximately 40% of the total project costs were funded by Title IV (AML Non-Water Program) funds for the reclamation of the AML features and approximately 60% of the total project costs were funded by the 2018 Abandoned Mine Lands Economic Revitalization (AMLER) funds for construction of the non-AML site improvements such as the parking area, gravel access road, and a boat launch area for kayaks and canoes. The project was completed on April 3, 2024 at a final cost of \$3,352,259.25.

In summary, this project transformed a dangerous, unproductive area that invited trespassing and littering into a lush public access area where the land and beauty of river can be appreciated and utilized for recreation.

Background: Provide a history of the mine, area, and any other pertinent information.

The Forest City East project encompasses 52.3 acres of abandoned mine land (AML) near the northern limit of the Northern Anthracite Coal field, in Northeastern Pennsylvania. The area includes portions of Forest City Borough in Susquehanna County, and Clinton Township in Wayne County. The coordinates of the site are 41° 39' 23.3" N, 75° 27' 51.5" W. The project area is bound to the west by the D&H Rail Trail and residential homes in Forest City Borough, and to the east by the Lackawanna River (HQ-CWF, MF).

The project area was subject to anthracite coal mining by Forest City Coal Co., Clinton Falls Coal Co., and Scranton Coal Co. Based on available mine maps and production reports, underground mining began in the early 1900s and ended circa 1935, with surface mining occurring later along the Lackawanna River through the 1940s and 50s; all mining was completed by 1960 and the site was left abandoned with multiple AML features (AMLFs).

Site visits identified eight (8) AMLFs within the project area, specifically four (4) Priority 2 Dangerous Piles and Embankments (DPEs) covering 16 acres, three (3) Priority 3 Gob piles (GO) covering 35 acres, and one (1) Priority 2 Hazardous Equipment/Facility (HEF), being a 30FT x 30FT x 10FT high concrete structure. All features were readily accessible by the public via public roadways and a nearby heritage walking trail, with many features being less than 120 feet from a residential roadway. The site had signs of heavy visitation including established ATV/walking trails and litter.

The presence of multiple piles of erodible material, and the proximity of the Lackawanna River, lead to significant hydraulic impacts to the site. By 1960, the river had formed a meandering off-shoot through the middle of the site that would frequently flood during heavy rains, resulting in coal refuse washing directly into the high-quality waterway and erosion damage to approximately 4,000 LF of the riverbank. The wet environment was also facilitating the growth of heavy stands of invasive Japanese Knot Weed throughout the project area.

Innovation of Current Technology: Describe new/improved technology used in the project (i.e. LIDAR). (12 points)

"Surgical" Project Limits along Riverfront:

This site was heavily polluted by coal refuse, including along the riverbank at the eastern project boundary. In lieu of relying on digital topographic mapping to set clearing limits that remove all existing vegetation along the waterway, the limit of clearing was established by physically surveying and closely inspecting the entire 4,000 LF of river frontage along the project. The survey carefully identified sections where healthy, non-invasive vegetation was established in natural soils and protected these areas from grading and disturbance. This ensured sections of the river that were already naturally stabilized were preserved, and reduced the amount of regrading and revegetation needed for the project. Analyses were completed nearly every 10 feet along the riverbank, and GNSS surveying equipment was used to mark very precise grading/clearing limits for the project. This information was shared digitally with the contractor to reference throughout the project.

Fish Salvage & Electrofishing:

Large piles of mine refuse and gob left throughout the site following surface mining activities led to significant erosion and sedimentation impacts to the adjacent Lackawanna River. These piles altered the landscape so severely that frequent flooding and erosion caused an unnatural meandering off-shoot to form and created a secondary channel through the site that was nearly as wide as the primary channel. Prior to eliminating the unnatural channel as part of this project, Department staff coordinated with the PA Fish & Boat Commission to conduct a fish salvage operation. Through the use of nets and electro-shock, fish cutoff from the main channel were caught and safely returned to the primary waterway.

Block Retaining Wall and Riprap Armoring:

The completed design incorporated a concrete block retaining wall with riprap armoring to protect the banks from erosion and prevent sediment pollution in the waterway. Armoring was accomplished by installing R-5 and R-6 stone, however the project also added smaller aggregate on the armoring to fill void space between the large stones to improve walkability for fishermen and visitors recreating along the banks.

Wetland Preservation/Natural Plantings:

Through the use of well defined grading limits, approximately 4-acres of healthy, productive wetlands were preserved on the site. The stormwater management design also included retentative grading and rain gardens to create 0.8 acres of new wetlands. Within the rain gardens, native blueberry bushes were planted to further stabilize the soil and provide benefit to local wildlife.

Difficulty of Achieving Reclamation Under Existing Conditions: Describe special or unique considerations and on-site difficulty of project. (17 points)

Site Made Up of Highly Erodable Material (HQ Waterway):

A primary constraint for this project was that all site work had to be completed along and in close proximity to the high-quality, cold water fishery, the Lackawanna River. Sprawling DPE and GO features meant that nearly all of the site was comprised of highly erodable material, and mine refuse piles extended all the way down the banks of the river; in many spots, the actual river bank was comprised completely of mine refuse. In addition to important erosion and sediment pollution controls, very high priority was placed on constantly maintaining a reverse slope away from the river during earthwork to ensure no additional refuse material made its way into the river. While performing final grading, initial design contours were adjusted onsite to balance cut/fill and maintain the correct flow paths of stormwater through the site.

Existing Meander to be Removed:

By the 1960s, the presence of man-made culm banks had caused significant sediment deposition and erosion damage to the Lackawanna River along the site, ultimately leading to an unnatural meander and bypass directly through the site that was nearly as large as the main channel. While the completed project would remove this meander and reestablish the natural stream path and limits, the site first needed to be completely dewatered. This was accomplished by first removing fish trapped in the meander, then blocking the inflow with sand/gravel tote-bags and placing the first sections of block retaining wall. On-site material was then piled behind what was now effectively a levee, and the flooded area quickly dewatered naturally.

Difficulty in Grading Along River & Encroachment:

A major design element of the project involved constructing an armored concrete block retaining wall along 1,135 feet of the river. This was made more complicated by the presence of the actual river, which had to be protected even while effectively working in the waterway. This was accomplished by temporarily installing large sand and gravel tote-bags to divert the river around excavation areas. The totes molded to the natural river stone bottom of the waterway and provided a functional work area without further disturbing the river bed. During heavy rain events, the swell of river caused damage to the temporary tote-bags, resulting in some being shifted or toppled. In some spots, additional totes were used as temporary excavator supports, granting machinery ideal access and approach angles to precisely cut gob and refuse from the banks and place the concrete retaining blocks while protecting the waterway. Throughout the life of the project, extreme care was required during all earthwork and grading activities to ensure refuse, gob, and other sediments were not lost or transported into the river.

Performing earthwork along and within the waterway also required additional permitting from the PA Fish & Boat Commission. Because this section of the river is classified as a naturally reproducing wild trout stream as well as a stocked trout fishery, instream construction was prohibited for nearly 6 months of year from Mid-February through June 1, and October through December 31. To complete the project in a timely manner, a waiver was requested and approved, permitting construction to be completed with only minor restrictions.

Existing Runoff & Stormwater Management:

The western project limit is flanked by Forest City Borough, a largely residential municipality. Prior to the project, the Borough conveyed much of its stormwater runoff into the site, with flows ultimately routing to the Lackawanna River at the eastern project limit. Along the western boundary, a large historic hewn stone culvert routed stormwater below the abandoned railroad grade and onto the site. To manage the offsite stormwater flows and preserve the historic stonework, multiple rain gardens and detention basins were designed and constructed within the project area. Stone and grass-lined ditches were used to convey waters from the west of the site, east to the Lackawanna River. Where the hewn stone culvert discharged, a ditch was strategically placed to capture the flows and eliminate the need to dismantle the structure or retrofit it with less-sightly culvert pipes. This wide scale approach to stormwater management within the project area not only created a longterm solution to manage stormwater discharges for the municipality, it also improved water quality by confining runoff to designed structures instead of discharging randomly through the coal refuse.

Invasive Plant Species:

The site was plagued with thick stands of invasive Japanese Knot Weed. As bulk earthwork began, areas with Knot Weed were fully scraped to remove the complete plant and roots. The invasive vegetation was fully removed from the site and landfilled to prevent it from returning and spreading throughout the reclaimed area.

On-site effectiveness: Describe effective or innovative use of technology, how the landscape conforms to the natural environment and elimination of significant health or safety problems. (23 points)

This project employed multiple methods to move the overall reclamation beyond typical earthmoving. By spending extra time early in the project, a very precise grading limit was established that preserved 4 acres of wetlands that already had well-established trees/vegetation in healthy soils. With assistance from PA Fish & Boat Commission, fish that found their way into the secondary channel/meander through the site were safely removed and returned to the main watercourse before the channel was blocked and graded away. By employing an expansive and robust stormwater management design, the site now acts as a large control system for stormwater runoff from nearby Forest City Borough and allows for the preservation of a historic hewn stone culvert located below the adjacent D&H Rail-to-Trail walking trail. Finally, the concrete block retaining walls with armoring act as literal shields to protect the riverbanks from future erosion and have created numerous fishing spots along the popular trout stream. The addition of smaller aggregate on top of the larger stone riprap armoring largely improves the walkability along the riverbank and greatly enhances access for anglers who wish to fish within or closer to the water.

The constraints of AML sites often limit the scope of what reclamation projects can achieve, as coal companies did not plan for productive reuse of the lands when they were abandoned decades ago. This site was especially impacted by large expanses of coal refuse and gob, making up over 50 acres of DPE and GO AMLFs across the project area that were actively impairing a high quality waterway, the Lackawanna River. The erosion and sedimentation had so greatly impacted the river that an meandering offshoot, nearly as large as the main channel, had formed and traversed the site. Through the reclamation project, this unnatural meander was removed and the river was returned to its pre-mining extents. The riverbanks were further protected by adding over 1,000 feet of concrete block retaining wall and riprap armoring to provide longterm erosion control. As shown in site photos collected during reclamation, the finished grading area is almost entirely coal refuse. To promote vegetative growth in this largely infertile material, fertilizer and soil amendments were added during seeding so vegetation could establish and begin the process of regenerating a healthy soil profile. In total, over 38 acres of AML was revegetated and 2,100 tree seedlings were planted within revegetated areas. The project preserved ~4 acres of productive wetlands with healthy trees and soils, and created 0.8 acres of new wetlands through two raingardens installed as part of the stormwater management design. What was previously a tangled mess of coal refuse, unnatural erosion channels, and thick stands of invasive Japanese Knot Weed is now a lush green expanse that is open to the public for fishing, walking, and recreation.

Funding: Describe effective use of funds and leveraging partners for funding or technology. (12 points)

Use of Funds:

The combination of the Title IV AML Program and 2018 AMLER Program funding allowed this project to be completed, where otherwise it would not be possible without the use of these multiple funding sources. This combination of funding also allowed the project to be completed without direct cost burden to local municipalities/counties. In addition, the knowledge, experience, and partnership between the many project partners propelled the project forward in a timely and well-coordinated manner.

To significantly reduce the total project costs, BAMR provided in-house project planning/development, design, drafting, permitting, construction management, and inspection services rather than utilizing private engineering and environmental consulting firms. The project was competitively bid and awarded to the lowest competent bidder, Earthmovers Unlimited, Inc. from Kylertown, PA. Although the final project cost was 17% over the bid amount, it was only 8% over the engineer's estimate for the project.

The project achieved numerous goals including:

- Fully reclaiming eight AMLFs spanning over 50-acres
- Performing 44 acres of clearing and grubbing
- 318,000 CY of earthwork and grading
- 1,135 feet of concrete block retaining wall with armoring along the Lackawanna River
- 38 acres of revegetation including 2,100 Black Cherry, Locust, White Oak, Red Oak, and Norway Spruce seedlings
- 6,500 SF of wetland plantings

As shown in post-construction photos, the vegetation is well established and the site has held up very well.

Use of Partners for Funding or Technology:

The PA Fish & Boat Commission assisted in multiple ways during the project. First, they offered equipment and technical support to complete the fish salvage operation that moved fish trapped in the secondary "erosion channel" back into the primary waterway. They also provided a conditioned waiver to allow construction to occur within and near the waterway during time-frames when it would otherwise be fully restricted. In 2026, the PA Fish & Boat Commission utilized the reclamation site as an access location to stock the river with trout. Finally, there is ongoing interest by the Commission to procure a long-term easement for 50 feet of shoreline along the property to ensure ready access to the waters and boat launch for the public to enjoy.

Forest City Borough completed public improvements along the right-of-way to include a concrete sidewalk so members of the public could safely walk to the reclaimed area.

The private landowner had an existing access permit (Highway Occupancy Permit) to allow vehicular access from the state-owned roadway into the site. This saved a lengthy step in the process, and provided immediate access for not only the project to be constructed, but also for the public to enjoy the reclaimed area. Very notably, the private landowner also opened the property to public use for recreation and access to the Lackawanna River.

Benefits to the community: Describe project support and long-term benefits to the community. (18 points)

This project balanced the interests of multiple stakeholders to achieve long-lasting benefits to the environment and community. Nearly the entire project area is privately owned, and the DPE/GO AML features were actively diminishing the water quality of the Lackawanna River. The residents of Forest City Borough lived with hazardous AMLFs in their backyard, and the public Rails-to-Trails walking trail routed visitors directly along the mine-scarred land.

As part of the project, the private landowner has opened the property to the public, providing a lush expanse with parking areas and gravel road access to the banks of the Lackawanna River. Visitors to the site now benefit from clean, safe land to use for walking and recreation, as well as ready access to a nearly one-mile-long stretch of Lackawanna River bordering the site that was previously inaccessible. The PA Fish & Boat Commission has also expressed interest in procuring a long-term agreement to ensure ongoing public access to the new public boat launch and ample fishing access for the natural trout waters.

The Lackawanna River Conservation Association is a non-profit watershed group focused on the quality and productive use of the Lackawanna River. Representatives from the group participated in multiple meetings during planning and design phases of the project, and were very pleased with the environmental and recreation improvements the project created.

A large amount of stormwater discharge from Forest City Borough routes through the site, ultimately flowing to the Lackawanna River. The project design and construction accommodated existing stormwater discharges, and created a stable and permanent stormwater management solution. By incorporating robust BMPs into the reclamation, the municipality did not need to alter any of their own systems, and the site now acts as a large BMP, actively improving the water quality of the downstream watershed and more effectively managing stormwater volume and rate releases from the site.

The D&H Rail-Trail is a 38-mile long public walking and biking trail that follows a portion of the former Delaware and Hudson rail line. The trail starts near the New York State border, and runs south through three counties, often following alongside the Lackawanna River. A leg of the trail borders the western project limit, and routes visitors directly along the reclamation area. Where visitors to the trail previously saw large refuse piles of culm and gob, they now overlook the expansive reclamation area. The project also preserved a historic hewn stone culvert built below the trail, and created ditches to collect and incorporate the associated stormwater discharges into the overall stormwater management facilities on the site.

In 2026, and for the first time, the PA Fish & Boat Commission utilized access created by the reclamation project for trout stocking in this section of the Lackawanna River. During multiple post-construction site visits, visitors were seen using the reclamation area for recreation activities including fishing, dog walking, and simply enjoying the view of the rehabilitated section of river.

During a site visit in April 2026, visitors offered the following statements:

"It's been wonderful because it's really brought people to this area now with the accessibility to the river, to the fishing, to the outdoors - it's really a great thing to see. I've seen a ton of people walking their dogs, playing with frisbees in the field, so it's really nice to see so much usage of this land."

"We're here probably 4 days a week, dog walking, and watching people fish, enjoy the space. We're thrilled with it, it's perfect."

"[The] cars that come in, everybody's been really respectful, driving really slow, they appreciate it. There hasn't been a mess, people clean up. I think the community really enjoys it and respects it."

"You'd never be able to tell there were culm banks here."

Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act: Describe how the project exceeded the spirit and intent of SMCRA, increased public awareness of SMCRA, as well as the transferability of reclamation strategies to other AML programs and projects. (18 points)

This project transformed over 50 acres of AML that has been polluting the headwaters of the Lackawanna River for nearly 100 years into a lush expanse that highlights what reclamation can achieve. An overgrown site that previously harbored trespassing and illegal dumping, now actively invites the public to recreate along the river to engage in kayaking, fishing, and walking. The existing Rails-to-Trails walking path along the western project limit overlooks the reclaimed area, giving visitors a view of stewardship instead of scarred land. For nearby residents who have lived near the unreclaimed site for years, and were able to see reclamation progress, the completed project is now a great example of BAMR's ongoing mission to reclaim Pennsylvania and return mine-scarred lands back to safe, productive use.

Not only has the project reclaimed dangerous AMLs that presented a risk of harm and were actively degrading the quality of a major watershed, it has returned the land back to the public for recreational use. There is also ongoing interest by the PA Fish & Boat Commission to secure a long-term agreement to ensure that the land and river access will remain open to the public for fishing, watercraft, and simply enjoying.

It's important to note that this is not an AML site hidden in the back woods or high hills. Instead, it sits at the foot of Forest City Borough, with residential homes less than 200 feet from the project limits, and has a popular rail-to-trail footpath directly adjacent to the reclamation area. The achievements of the project are in plain view for everyone in the area to see, and visitors now regularly frequent the previously inaccessible site. A popular local news station, WNEP, published a story in 2023 summarizing the reclamation activities during construction; it is available to view at the following link:
<https://www.wnep.com/article/news/local/susquehanna-county/cleaning-up-abandoned-mine-site/523-3d270aa4-129c-481b-856e-d23c979e02df>

This project balanced preservation with reclamation by scrutinizing grading limits to protect healthy, established vegetation, and designing stormwater management facilities that preserved a historic stone culvert associated with the nearby abandoned railway. The stormwater design also manages significant stormwater flows from the nearby borough to improve downstream water quality throughout the watershed.

Although many reclamation projects often boil down to grading and earthwork, there are some unique elements to this project that would absolutely enhance other reclamation projects across the country:

- 1) Identify and preserve natural soils, and existing, healthy, non-invasive vegetation. Utilize actual field surveys to ensure accurate grading limits instead of relying solely on digital topographic mapping or property lines.
- 2) Preserve structurally sound historic structures. For this project, the old stone culvert was still effectively routing stormwater, but also stood as a reminder of a different time when craftsmanship was vital to function.
- 3) Utilize stacked or sequenced stormwater BMPs to manage stormwater across a site instead of at a single point.
- 4) Secure long-term public use of reclaimed land through easements/access agreements with outdoor-oriented agencies.

Videos, Graphics & Photography: Submit links to videos and photography/graphics with captions below. Photographs, images and videos submitted as part of the nomination may be used to highlight the project for other purposes than the awards.

As-Built Plans:

0- As-Built-Plans_Forest-City-East (PDF) - *Construction As-Built plans for the project*

Photographs:

- 1- Before, During, After Aerial Imagery - *Aerial imagery captured in 2022, 2023, and 2024 of the project site (facing north)*
- 2- Aerial Image of Reclaimed Area 2025 - *Aerial imagery of reclamation area from 2025, Forest City Borough visible on left*
- 3- Aerial Image of River Meander - *Aerial imagery of winding meander through site; refuse areas visible at top of photo*
- 4- Gob and Refuse along Riverbank - *Steep erodable refuse banks directly along waterway*
- 5- Meander through Refuse - *Erosion channel through site through gob and refuse material*
- 6- Sketch of Block Wall at Divergence - *Informal detail showing block wall design to remove secondary meander*
- 7- Cofferdam along River - *Temporary cofferdam along waterway*
- 8- Aerial Cofferdam along River - *Aerial imagery of cofferdam along waterway*
- 9- Riprap armoring - *Riprap armoring and ESPC along waterway*
- 10- Block Wall and Armoring - *Completed section of block wall and armoring*
- 11- Gravel Access Bulb with River - *Aerial imagery of gravel access road and section of block wall with armoring*

Video:

- 12- Interviews and Drone Videos - *Onsite interviews with stakeholders and members of the public. Drone video collected during and post-reclamation*



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