
Economic Development Success Stories from Abandoned Mine Reclamation

Turning Environmental Liabilities into Economic Opportunities

There are many projects across the United States that would qualify for RECLAIM Act funds and are excellent examples of how this work has already shown positive impacts.

Kentucky: Flooding risk to tourism opportunity at the Portal 31 Mine Exhibit

In the town of Lynch, Kentucky, the Harlan County Fiscal Court has led a project that would address flooding issues in two underground mine portals, refurbish a coal mine exhibit in one of the portals, and renovate a historic coal company bathhouse and administration building adjacent to the portal. Lynch, Kentucky was once the largest coal town in the world and a destination for workers from across the globe. The project builds on the town's mining and labor history for tourism and education by remediating flooding in the mine and refurbishing the tour exhibits. It showcases the beauty of East Kentucky's natural landscapes by increasing access to Black Mountain. Finally, it supports local entrepreneurs pursuing small enterprises rooted in a history of mountain music, arts, and agriculture. Overall, the project is estimated to create 20 new permanent jobs.

West Virginia: Agriculture Opportunities at Kermit Aquaponics Facility

In Kermit, West Virginia, population 392, another project has remediated a pair of pre-SMCRA abandoned coal mine portals and will be the site for an aquaponics facility that will sustainably grow fish and produce for regional food markets. Led by the Mingo County Redevelopment Authority, Sprouting Farms, and a variety of partners, the project will be powered by on-site solar energy and employ ten people full time upon completion. The Kermit aquaponics project is a prime example of how pre-SMCRA mine cleanup can be linked with cutting-edge development to abate a human safety hazard and create local jobs in a struggling community.

Maryland: Recreational Tourism at Potomac River North Branch Remediation

In Maryland, acid mine drainage (AMD) from pre-SMCRA coal mining once decimated the North Branch of the Potomac River. The stream, which ran orange from AMD and killed local fish and wildlife, was remediated by the Maryland mine reclamation and a set of agency and local partners throughout the 1990s and 2000s. According to a 2010 study, a "remarkable improvement in water quality is the direct result of the installation of eight dosers since 1992, which add alkaline material to the river and its tributaries to treat acid mine drainage from abandoned coal mines." After the North Branch was remediated, boating and angling in the stream brought an economic impact of \$3 million and forty full time-equivalent jobs.

Ohio: Sunday Creek Remediation

In Athens County, a proposed project would remediate the acid mine drainage (AMD)-impacted Sunday Creek by removing iron for use as paint pigments. The iron removed from the water can be sold to produce highly sought-after paint pigments with a demonstrated potential profitability that may more than offset AMD treatment costs. The project stems from a partnership between an artist, a scientist at Ohio University where the treatment process was developed, and a regional non-profit Rural Action. It demonstrates the potential of remediating AMD-impacted streams and putting the extracted metal to reuse.

Pennsylvania: Business Centers on Abandoned Surface and Underground Mines

Abandoned surface and underground mines had left a scarred landscape in Luzerne County, PA, including dangerous highwalls, acid mine drainage, and open mine shafts. The West Suscon project reclamation efforts won the OSMRE's 2009 Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation National Award. A business park was constructed on the graded surface. The commerce and trade park employs over 4,500 people and is home to 39 companies, including Lowe's, FedEx Ground, and Men's Warehouse. While more industrial parks are not the economic solution for many rural communities, this case study demonstrates that mine sites could be reclaimed for "brick and mortar" project applications like local businesses, job training facilities, and business incubators.

Illinois: Supporting Small Business Development in Prime Farmland

As with many small businesses located near prime farmland, Quality Flooring had difficulty finding affordable land available to open their facility. Access to reclaimed mine land provided an alternative that allowed them to open a thriving local business, preserved prime farmland and put an abandoned slag pile to productive use. Located on the former Clyde Mine Addition near Gillespie, IL, the site was reclaimed in 1978 and purchased by the company in 2006. Quality Flooring sells flooring products throughout Central Illinois and was named the Coal Country Chamber of Commerce's Business of the Year in 2007. It remains one of the largest independent flooring retailers in the area. Nearby, Ideal Fabricating, which makes industrial grade trash dumpsters, and Aladdin Steel, which manufactures steel pipe and tubing, have also been able to open on reclaimed mine lands, together adding over 80 jobs to the rural community.

Virginia: Dante Multi-Use Trail System

In Dante, Virginia, once home to the headquarters of the Clinchfield Coal Corporation, the Dante Community Association has recently secured funding for a community revitalization project that will remediate two pre-SMCRA abandoned mine portals, safely remove the dilapidated Arty Lee School, and connect downtown Dante to a new trail system for recreational use. The multi-use trail system will use old rail and coal roads or new trails to connect the Dante ballfield, a local museum downtown, a future general store, the Mountain View Trail System, and the nearby town of St. Paul. The project will cost approximately \$534,000 and project spending will result in total local economic activity valued at \$1,173,000 and indirectly support eight jobs across multiple sectors in the local economy.

Wyoming: Glenrock and Rolling Hills Wind Farms

In Converse County, Wyoming, a massive surface coal mine was converted into a 158-turbine wind farm. The 14,000-acre Dave Johnston Mine produced 104 million tons of sub-bituminous coal between 1958 and 2000. The abandoned land already had a significant system of transmission lines nearby, and the landscape is dominated by rolling hills and significant winds. The wind farm, built in 2008, now produces 237 Megawatts (MW) of electricity, enough to power 66,800 households.

The lessons from these stories are clear: the ideas in the RECLAIM Act work. Abandoned mine lands can be transformed into engines of economic opportunity, creating stronger communities and ecosystems at the same time.
