

WEST HUNTINGTON JOINT RECLAMATION PROJECT

Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Project

Huntington, Arkansas

Prepared by

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Project Start Date: June 1998
Completion Date: September 1999
Construction Cost: \$408,364
Contractor: Axioo, Inc.

Submitted: February 2001

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION OF WORK

In late 1997 the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) approached the Surface Mining and Reclamation Division (SMRD) of the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality to advocate integrating the resources of both agencies to jointly reclaim an abandoned mine land site. Both government agencies had been successfully reclaiming abandoned coal mine sites in the Arkansas River Valley for nearly 20 years. Historically, the SMRD and the NRCS have

succeeded in maintaining a very professional and affable working relationship. The NRCS allowed the SMRD to use their pre-existing aerial data to digitize an AML site near the town of Huntington in southern Sebastian County. Aerial photos, procured under a separate NRCS reclamation project, contained enough aerial coverage to partially digitize a site the SMRD had an interest in. The SMRD secured the services of a photogrammetric engineer to digitize the NRCS aerial photography. Approximately 30 percent of the project was not included in the NRCS aerial photography. The SMRD staff determined the depths of all the water bodies and surveyed the undefined area. This cooperative spirit saved the SMRD a substantial measure of time and money. The West Huntington Joint Reclamation Project was embraced as the ideal joint project for the pooling of funds from the NRCS and the SMRD. Through a cooperative agreement, the NRCS agreed to provide the first \$200,000 of construction costs incurred.

The 54-acre West Huntington Joint Reclamation Project can be observed from an area adjacent to State Highway 252 located one mile west of the junction of U.S. Highway 71 and State Highway 252 in Huntington. The project is located on the north side of the highway in the S½ of the NE¼ of Section 26, Township 5 North, Range 31 West on the Huntington, Arkansas 7.5 Minute Quadrangle. The project is located in Problem Area No. AR0021, the Huntington Problem Area. The project area was surface-mined by F. S. Neely Coal Company from 1962-63 and abandoned unreclaimed shortly thereafter.

The town of Huntington has a rich history in coal mining. It also has the dubious distinction of being the gateway to the most extensive unreclaimed surface and underground coal mine tract in the state with surface and underground mines extending west and north of the town. The project area is part of the Cavanal Syncline, a coal-bearing geological structure that plunges southwest. The surface-mined areas within the problem area had lain idle for over 35 years, yet the dark grey shale at the surface had yielded only a sparse cover of volunteer noxious weeds, shrubs, and trees.

It had the typical dangerous mine-related features that fascinate the public: steep and unstable piles and embankments that were used by all-terrain enthusiasts to test their driving skills; a dangerous vertical and unstable highwall with a road at the top edge; and treacherously deep water bodies, some containing acid water that were used for swimming.

Open dumping was prevalent throughout the project area. Some areas of the pits that could be easily accessed by the public, had become shrouded with large caches of garbage extending from the top of the pit downward into the water. Acid-forming conditions of the mine spoil and the water readily broke down the refuse into detrimental leachates. The physical framework of the nearby mine spoil and the underground mine itself, produced maximum hydraulic conductivities thereby readily facilitating leachates into the area ground water regime.

An intimidating 1,600-foot stretch of highwall was located behind the Huntington Veterans of Foreign Wars building. There were six hazardous water bodies at the base of the highwall, two of which were classified by the Army Corps of Engineers as water bodies of the United States. In the reclamation plan developed for the project, all six of the water bodies were to be backfilled, thus eliminating the dangerous highwall and the hazardous water bodies.

The pre-bid conference was held on May 20, 1998 and the bid opening occurred on May 27, 1998. With a low bid of \$403,364, Axioo Construction, Inc. of Mulberry, Arkansas was awarded the construction contract. The project contained over 24 acres of clearing and grubbing and 550,000 cubic yards of earthwork. The contractor commenced clearing and grubbing activities on June 15, 1998 and the augmented liming and fertilization, the last contractual requirement, were completed by the fall of 1999.

In what could be regarded as a serendipitous and well-timed revelation, the SMRD discovered that the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department and Sebastian County Road Department had been heedful of a dangerous stretch of State Highway 252 along the project fringes. In years past, when the road had been constructed as a county thoroughfare, its sinuous course had been dictated by the formidable spoil ridges (refer to black and white aerial photograph). Straightening the stretch of highway would not have been economically feasible had the reclamation not occurred. Reclaiming the spoil ridges along State Highway 252 would allow the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department and the Sebastian County Road Department to straighten the crooked stretch of highway. The SMRD designed the appropriate part of the project area to accommodate the future planned road-straightening project. The reclamation work in the area of the alternate road route entailed moving 45,000 cubic yards of material at a cost of \$22,950, the placement of 979 cubic yards of rip-rap at a cost of \$19,570 and 2,280 square feet of filter fabric at a cost of \$3420 for a total savings to the taxpayers of \$45,940. The reader is referred to the photos for the before and after locations of State Highway 252.

The reclamation of the site eliminated several health and safety hazards in an integral part of the Huntington Problem Area. The public can no longer be intimidated by a menacing 1,600-foot stretch of dangerous highwall that skirted the west side of the town. Since the reclaimed area is now a wide-open expanse, clandestine trash dumping is unlikely to occur and ground water degradation will be henceforth ameliorated. A dangerously crooked stretch of State Highway 252 was eliminated. The project proved to be an excellent synergistic opportunity between federal, state and county authorities that saved the taxpayers thousands of dollars.