

## **Presenting the 2014 ECHO Award to R. John Dawes**

December 10, 2014  
Washington, D.C.

Good afternoon, and welcome to everyone.

A few years ago, some of us at OSMRE were reflecting on OSMRE's reclamation awards. OSMRE had done a very good job of recognizing state and tribal AML programs that did exemplary work in restoring the land and water that were damaged by coal mining and abandoned after mining had ceased.

OSMRE had also done a good job recognizing coal mining companies that also did a good job in reclaiming land and water. Both reclamation award programs provided an incentive to companies, states and tribes to improve their reclamation.

The big unanswered question was why OSMRE had never taken the time to honor the individuals who have made significant contributions to advance the implementation of SMCRA. That lack of recognition was not right. Everyone in this room probably knows someone who has spent many hours advocating for cleaner water, reclaimed land, replanted forests, and a strong implementation of SMCRA. And so, the ECHO award was born.

The two previous recipients of the ECHO, Dave Clark, and John Husted, set the standard in many ways for what we at OSMRE are looking for in an ECHO award recipient.

As many of you know, Dave Clark, who is a quiet and unassuming man, was a steadfast proponent of geomorphic reclamation, while working for the state of New Mexico. His vision of what was possible, and his dedication to achieve that vision, gave

credence to the idea that we could restore land in a way that accurately mimics the original form and function. A way that was better than the standard practice. Geomorphic reclamation is now a reality in several western states. It is a cost effective and environmentally effective means of restoring the land after mining has been completed.

Our second honoree, John Husted, spent more than 35 years as an Ohio state employee working in coal country, but he did not receive the ECHO for length of government service. Mr. Husted was recognized for his accomplishments that went beyond his regular job duties. For example, he was instrumental in the development of Ohio's "ask before you build" development guide, a tool that stressed the importance of evaluating the presence of abandoned mine land issues prior to site development by local governments, landowners and developers. This guide was adopted by several other states. He also played a very important role in the development and management of the Ohio mine subsidence insurance program, a program that lets homeowners purchase insurance to protect themselves when the abandoned mine beneath their home collapses.

The accomplishments for which Dave Clark and John Husted were recognized continue to resonate in the communities where they worked and in other communities. Their accomplishments continue to provide positive returns.

Which brings us to our third ECHO award recipient, John Dawes.

I have known John for many years. He is known throughout Pennsylvania, and the region, as a strong advocate for cleaning up polluted waterways across Pennsylvania. In particular, for addressing acid mine drainage. He has supported the studies of mine drainage, supported treatment system design, and treatment system construction. But John does not do all of the work alone.

John is the backbone of the Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds. In 20 years as the executive director, he has overseen more than 150 grants to environmental and watershed groups throughout the state. Those seed grants have grown into more than one hundred million dollars in project work. Several hundred miles of Pennsylvania streams have been improved by the projects he supported.

John's support is not limited to the study and treatment of mine drainage. He also has exhibited the vision to be the first supporter of innovative projects. A case in point is the Pittsburgh Botanic Garden. About fifteen years ago John provided the first funding to convert acres of abandoned coal mines and polluted mine drainage into a botanic garden, an education center, and a recreation center. When no one else would step up John convinced people to make that first investment. Others followed. That investment has converted a community liability into an economic asset for Pittsburgh.

He has also provided funding to support the use of an abandoned underground coal mine discharge as a source of geothermal energy. Energy to heat and to cool buildings. He has funded a new edition of the SMCRA handbook, which is a citizens guide to the Federal mining law. The new edition was to incorporate the various court decisions and other changes that had occurred after the handbook was published some decades ago. I will not go on here and list every project he has supported, but if you want to learn more, and John's water protection interests go beyond AMD, go to the foundation's website for a trove of information of John's work.

But one more thing about John's accomplishments that are important to OSMRE and the country. This is something you will not find on the website. John was the co-chair of various environmental groups who worked in the late '90s / early 2000's to get the

abandoned mine land fee reauthorized. Reauthorization took about a decade. Even though John was a co-chair, he really led and coordinated the groups' efforts. During the times when success looked unattainable, John kept people focused, he kept people going. He kept them working toward the goal of restoring more of our world. Those efforts have and continue to have a very positive impact on our water resources, on our lands, on our environment and ecosystems, and on the people who have jobs fulfilling a major promise of the surface mining control and reclamation act of 1977. John's accomplishments will continue to result in the elimination of more dangerous mines, in the elimination of more mine drainage, in the restoration of more ecosystems and will continue to provide jobs for the next decade or more.

What I have just described embody the exact attributes and accomplishments we look for when we honor someone with the ECHO. Their accomplishments continue to resonate in coal country for years.

The attributes we recognize with the ECHO award are inscribed on the base of the tower, which we will display here at OSMRE headquarters. They are: public service, sustained engagement, non-partisanship, major contribution, advocate of the law, protection of society, innovative solutions, and environmental protection. These are the attributes we look for in ECHO award honorees. John clearly embodies those attributes, and because of that, I am very pleased to present him with this, the 2014 ECHO.

John, thank you for everything, and thank you on behalf of all of the various groups for the use of your cabin.