

News Release

Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSM)
A Bureau of the U. S. Department of the Interior



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: August 31, 2020
Contact: [Christopher Holmes](#)
(202) 208-2565

Five State Programs Win Coveted 2020 OSM Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Awards

Bureau to honor exemplary AML projects in September

WASHINGTON – The [Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement \(OSM\)](#) is pleased to announce the winners of its [2020 Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Awards](#). The winning projects represent the nation’s highest achievements in Abandoned Mine Land (AML) reclamation, demonstrating innovative reclamation techniques and outstanding results in restoring previously mined lands.

This year’s award winners are being recognized for: reclaiming 70 acres of coal refuse piles along the Little Conemaugh River in Pennsylvania; abating the threat of landslides that threatened homes in a West Virginia neighborhood; eliminating dangerous highwalls at AML sites in North Dakota and Indiana; and resolving public safety concerns due to open mine portals near a popular hiking trail in Alabama.



“As a former manager of abandoned mine land projects, I understand how hard our state and tribal partners work to achieve exemplary results,” said [OSM Principal Deputy Director Lanny E. Erdos](#). “I look forward to presenting our winners with these well-deserved awards.”

Established in 1992, the Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Awards recognize exemplary state and tribal reclamation projects that reclaim coal mine sites abandoned prior to the signing of the [Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 \(SMCRA\)](#). Eligible projects are funded wholly or in part by OSM’s AML Reclamation Fund. OSM’s AML Reclamation Program addresses the hazards and environmental degradation posed by two centuries of coal mining that occurred before SMCRA was enacted.

OSM managers, together with state and tribal reclamation officials, determined this year’s winners. There are three categories of Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Awards: National, Small Project and Regional. Here are this year’s winners:



Small Project Award

The Small Project Award recognizes a project that cost less than \$1 million and is in a state that receives less than \$6 million in annual AML funds.

Ruffner Mountain Portals AML Project

Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program

Alabama Department of Labor

Open mine portals in a nature preserve adjacent to several popular hiking trails posed a danger not only to the public, but also to the over 600 Tricolor bats that called the portals home. When a bat study confirmed the presence of White-nose syndrome within the bat population, the urgency to limit human entry to the portals was heightened.

Alabama's AML program reclaimed the site, resolving public safety concerns while minimizing the ecological impact to the local area.

Regional Awards

Regional Awards honor the best projects from around the country.

Appalachian States Regional Award

Ridgeway Drive (Ferrell & McDaniel) Landslide Emergencies

Office of Abandoned Mine Lands

West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)

In 2018, West Virginia received two different reports of landslides within the same neighborhood. Calls from concerned residents regarding these slides, and the subsequent investigations by West Virginia's AML program, revealed that more than 10 homes were threatened, while another home had slid partially downhill. With the threat to people's lives and property imminent, West Virginia's quick response abated the threats to the residents and helped to stabilize their properties, preventing further damage and economic loss.

Interior States Regional Award

Buttermilk Highwalls, AML Site 1820

Division of Reclamation, Abandoned Mine Land Program

Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

Two large and dangerous highwalls located near a public road posed a danger to anyone driving, hiking, hunting or fishing near the Sugar Ridge Fish and Wildlife Area. Indiana's AML program worked with one of its sister agencies in the Indiana DNR to address the hazards. This collaborative effort eliminated 1,615 linear feet of dangerous highwalls while mitigating future acid mine drainage (AMD) problems, improving wetland areas, and providing better wildlife habitat, all of which improved recreational opportunities at the site.

Western States and Tribes Regional Award

The Carrick Mine AML Project

Abandoned Mine Lands Division

North Dakota Public Service Commission (PSC)

A 20-acre abandoned mine site located near two popular recreation areas contained dangerous highwalls and a large, water-filled pit. The site not only posed a hazard to the public, but also raised liability concerns for private landowners who used the property as horse pasture and a hunting area. North Dakota's AML program addressed these issues by eliminating approximately 1,300 feet of dangerous highwalls, creating a pond that recharges fresh water, and preserving a prehistoric, petrified tree stump, estimated to be between 55 and 60 million years old.



National Award

The National Award Recognizes the overall highest-rated reclamation project.

Ehrenfeld AML Pilot Reclamation / Recreation & Watershed Improvement Project

Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)

Approximately 70 acres of coal refuse piles located along the "Johnstown Path of the Flood Trail," posed multiple environmental threats to the area. Frequent erosion clogged an unnamed tributary to the Little Conemaugh River, as a result, highly acidic water leached into and subsequently impaired local streams, burning areas of refuse piles and degrading air quality for the residents. To address these hazards, Pennsylvania's AML Program removed the refuse piles, eliminated the surface burning conditions and improved the Little Conemaugh watershed. The reclamation project has resulted in new opportunities for recreation and tourism with the addition of a community park and safer walking trails.

The *2020 Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Awards* honor the most exemplary AML reclamation projects in the nation each year. OSM will present the 2020 Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Awards in September via a virtual awards ceremony in cooperation with the National Association of Abandoned Mine Land Programs (NAAMLPL).

###

The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) carries out the requirements of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 in cooperation with states and tribes. OSMRE'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 coal mines.

