

NEWS RELEASE
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PSC Receives National Award for Abandoned Mine Lands Reclamation Project

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Public Service Commission’s Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) Program has been awarded the 2020 Western States and Tribes Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Award from the federal Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE). The award is given annually to honor the highest quality projects across the nation to reclaim abandoned coal mines and is the highest honor a reclamation program can achieve.

“This award really highlights the great work of the PSC’s Abandoned Mine Lands Division employees and our contractors,” said Commissioner Randy Christmann, who holds the Reclamation and AML portfolios. “Every year we restore dangerous mine lands that were abandoned decades ago into safe and healthy properties entirely with fees paid by active coal mines. It is an excellent public-private partnership.”

North Dakota’s AML Program has been selected to receive the award for the exceptional work done as part of the Carrick Mine AML Project. The 20-acre Carrick Mine is located about 35 miles west of Bismarck in Morton County. Very little is known about the history of the Carrick Mine, but historical aerial imagery shows mining began before 1938 and ceased by 1957. In 2018, approximately 1,300 feet of dangerous 40-foot highwalls remained. Landowners had expressed concern about the mine’s hazard, their liability and the poor water quality remaining at the former mine pit.

Before reclamation could be started in June 2018, a unique obstacle had to be removed. A prehistoric tree stump, unearthed during mining operations, needed to be moved. The stump was identified by a PSC geologist as a Metasequoia Stump (also known as the Dawn Redwood) estimated to be between 55 and 60 million years old. The stump was successfully moved and preserved using an excavator and tow straps. Work then moved forward to reclaim the highwalls. Final survey showed the total dirt excavated by a contractor during the project was a little over 90,000 cubic yards. Reclamation was effective in transforming a nearly vertical highwall into a more gently sloping area that can now be driven over safely. Excavation also included constructing two ponds and reestablishing a channel between them. Today the ponds have a nearly continuous flow of fresh water and are used by horses and wildlife. Many trees and shrubs were also planted by the Morton County Soil Conservation District and have created a wildlife area that benefits the entire region.

The AML Program will be presented with the award during a virtual awards presentation and the project will also be highlighted during a reclamation awards banquet scheduled in 2021.

The goal of the AML Program is to eliminate hazards related to coal mining that was conducted prior to the enactment of the 1977 federal reclamation act. The Commission receives funds for the program from the federal Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement from the collection of a federal reclamation fee that is collected on all coal that is mined.

The North Dakota Public Service Commission is a constitutionally created state agency with authority to permit, site and regulate certain business activities in the state including electric and gas utilities, telecommunications companies, power plants, electric transmission lines, pipelines, railroads, auctioneers, commercial weighing devices, pipeline safety and coal mine reclamation. For more information, contact the Public Service Commission at (701) 328-2400 or www.psc.nd.gov.

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