

North Dakota Completes Reclamation at the Columbus Mine

After fourteen reclamation projects over a period of 25 years, the North Dakota Public Service Commission's Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) Division plans to complete work at the Columbus Mine project site in 2012. The 1280-acre Columbus abandoned surface mine site is located in the northwest corner of the state about ten miles south of the Canadian border.

Surface mining began at this site as early as 1902, shortly after the city of Columbus was settled. Several small "wagon mines" provided lignite coal to area residents between 1900 and 1920 for a dollar a ton or less. Beginning around 1918 larger strip mines began to operate and by 1923, the Truax Brothers Kincaid Mine was producing over 100,000 tons of coal per year. This mine fueled a Montana-Dakota Utilities power plant and shipped coal across the state.



Surface mining began near Columbus, ND, around 1902. By 1923 the, Truax Coal Company's Kincaid (Columbus) Mine was producing over 100,000 tons of coal per year. Truax-Traer Coal Company and Consolidation Coal Company operated this mine until 1968, producing more than 12 million tons of lignite coal.



2012 will mark the completion of 14 reclamation projects at the Columbus Mine. These projects were conducted to backfill nearly nine miles of dangerous highwalls and level and revegetate about 700 acres

In 1927, Chicago businessman, Glen Traer, joined the Truax brothers to form Truax-Traer Coal Company, one of the most successful enterprises in the history of coal development. By 1948, Truax-Traer produced over 1.5 million tons of coal annually at three mines in North Dakota. In 1955, it became a Fortune 500 company with \$2.5 million in profits and 2300 employees in the US and Canada. Truax-Traer operated the Kincaid (Columbus) Mine from 1927 to 1962, when the company was purchased by Consolidation Coal Company, and the mine continued in operation until 1968. In its 42 years of operation, the mine produced over 12 million tons of coal.

Benefits of coal mining near Columbus included relatively cheap fuel and electricity, employment and infrastructure. Its detrimental impacts included vast acreages of barren and unstable spoil piles, hazardous water bodies, equipment and facilities, and dangerous highwalls.

The North Dakota AML Division began reclamation work at the Columbus Mine in 1988 to backfill dangerous highwalls near a public highway. Since then, twelve projects have been conducted to backfill approximately 7.5 miles of dangerous highwalls, level unstable spoil piles, and revegetate more than 340 acres at a cost of \$5.5 million. Phases 13 and 14, which will be conducted in 2012, will include backfilling another 7000 feet of dangerous highwalls and leveling and revegetating 350 more acres. The North Dakota AML Division also plans to construct a public interpretive display within the city of Columbus to chronicle the history of mining and AML projects conducted at the Columbus site.

The Columbus AML Project Series has been a major accomplishment for the North Dakota AML Division and for the citizens of North Dakota.



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Primary hazards at the Columbus Mine were steep mine highwalls. These nearly vertical cliffs remaining from final pits were 60 feet high in some areas. Other adverse impacts of mining included barren and unstable highwalls, hazardous water bodies and decrepit equipment and facilities.