

NEWS RELEASE
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PSC Presents Reclamation Award to the Coyote Creek Mining Company

BISMARCK, ND – The North Dakota Public Service Commission (PSC) recently awarded the Coyote Creek Mining Company as the recipient of this year’s Award for Excellence in Surface Coal Mining and Reclamation. The PSC’s Reclamation Division recommended the company be recognized based on positive feedback from staff who frequently conduct inspections at the mine. The recommendation recognizes Coyote Creek’s sustained efforts to incorporate reclamation into the day-to-day planning and operation of the mine.

“The coal mining industry in North Dakota functions under numerous strict requirements, and the Coyote Creek Mine has been operating above and beyond the basic requirements to meet standards,” said Commission Chair Randy Christmann, who holds the coal reclamation portfolio.

The Coyote Creek Mining Company operates the Coyote Creek Mine encompassing approximately 8,443 acres near Beulah, N.D., which delivers approximately two million tons of coal annually to the Coyote Station. In a memo sent to Commissioners, PSC staff outlined many efforts the mine has taken that demonstrate a consistent commitment to limiting unnecessary disturbance, advancing reclamation as soon as practicable, maintaining agricultural use, protecting valuable natural features, and improving the long-term success of reclaimed lands. These efforts include the following:

- Timely, contemporaneous reclamation by reclaiming areas as they become available following mining. This practice reduces both the total acreage disturbed at one time and the length of time land remains unavailable for productive use. It also reduces the potential for erosion, weed establishment and other conditions that can complicate reclamation.
- Taking measures to avoid disturbing woody draws. Preserving these features protects established trees and shrubs, wildlife habitat, shelter and natural draining functions.
- Revising plans to improve the timing and sequencing of reclamation. These revisions enabled watersheds and drainage areas within those watersheds to be reclaimed sooner than would otherwise have been possible.
- Making substantial efforts to maintain access throughout the mines so that land not needed for active mining can remain in agriculture production. This has required the annual installation and relocation of fencing, as well as repeated modification to livestock water-delivery systems.
- Installing many miles of temporary fencing and a livestock pipeline water system to support prescribed grazing on reclaimed lands. This infrastructure allows livestock distribution, stocking rates and grazing timing to be managed according to the condition of the reclaimed land. This investment by the mine supports responsible vegetation management and the orderly return of reclaimed acreage to agricultural use.

- Demonstrating exceptional diligence in controlling noxious weeds on undisturbed lands and lands affected by mining activities. In addition to spot spraying to control non-native cool season grasses and weeds, staff observed the former mine operations manager and now its current President Donn Steffen stop and manually pull up a wormwood plant. These actions reflect the hands-on commitment to conducting effective weed control and land stewardship.
- Investing in a watering system that will provide irrigation for newly planted trees. Establishing trees on reclaimed lands can require several years of active management, particularly during dry conditions. The watering system will improve tree survivability and help ensure that tree-planting efforts result in functional, long-term woody vegetation rather than just satisfying an initial planting requirement.

All of these accomplishments demonstrate a coordinated and sustained approach to mine planning, land stewardship, agricultural continuity and long-term reclamation success. Coyote Creek's efforts provide a strong example of how active mining and innovative reclamation can be managed together to reduce impacts and improve post-mine land-use outcomes.

The award was presented to the Coyote Creek Mining Company during the Lignite Energy Council's Annual Meeting held in Bismarck this week.

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, 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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Photo Credit: Lignite Energy Council

Left to Right: Tyler Barth, Coyote Creek Mining Company; Donn Steffen, Coyote Creek Mining Company; Comm. Randy Christmann, NDPSC; Steve Dub, Coyote Creek Mining Company; Lee Becker, Coyote Creek Mining Company