



Office of Surface Mining Highlights

Introduction

The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSM) ensures that coal mines are operated in a manner that protects citizens and the environment during mining, that the land is restored to beneficial use following mining, and that the effects of past mining are mitigated by aggressively pursuing reclamation of abandoned coal mines. The Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) provides the means for restoring abandoned coal mines through collection of a tonnage-based reclamation fee assessed on current coal production.

OSM Mission

"To carry out the requirements of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) in cooperation with States and Tribes."

Currently, 24 States have regulatory programs in place and OSM continues to work with Indian Tribes to enable them to assume primacy. Twenty-three States and three Tribes administer approved abandoned mine land reclamation programs. These primacy States are successfully implementing their approved regulatory programs. OSM's role has evolved to establishing policy direction and guidance, providing grants to primacy States and Tribes, conducting oversight activities in accordance with SMCRA, and administering and operating programs on Federal and Tribal lands and in States that have not assumed primacy.

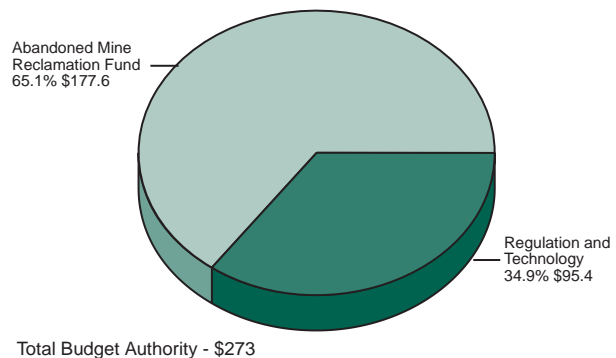
Abandoned Mine Lands

Abandoned Mine Land (AML) reclamation programs allow OSM to aggressively accelerate the restoration of abandoned mine sites adversely affected by past coal mining practices. These abandoned mine sites pose significant threats to human safety. OSM directs grants to State and Tribal programs and Federal high-priority projects that support the President's Clean Water Action Plan. States and Tribes use AML funds to address environmental problems at abandoned coal mine sites resulting from past coal mining practices.

Funds for Mine Reclamation

OSM's 1998 budget authority was \$273 million. This budget enables OSM to support the States' mining programs by matching their regulation and enforcement costs dollar for dollar. It also pays 100 percent of the cost for restoring abandoned mines that were left unreclaimed before the SMCRA was passed in 1977. Funds for reclaiming abandoned mines come from tonnage-based reclamation fees paid by America's active coal mines.

1998 OSM Budget Authority
(in millions)



Partnerships

OSM is continuing its efforts to establish partnerships to improve and increase outreach efforts that allow full participation from its stakeholders in addressing common problems. These initiatives will assist OSM in forging a bond and partnership with stakeholders that will endure well into the 21st century. OSM is focusing on several new approaches in implementing the SMCRA. These initiatives include increased emphasis on the Appalachian Clean Streams Initiative to facilitate State and local coalitions to clean up acid mine drainage and improve the environment and quality of life for coalfield citizens. Through this initiative, approximately 80 State and Federal agencies, local soil and water conservation districts, national conservation organizations, private foundations, and coalfield residents have formalized their commitment to work together through a Statement of Mutual Intent.

In 1998, OSM continued to work with stakeholders to improve the surface mining program. Improvements included developing new environmental policies and procedures that provided benefits to coal field citizens, enhanced the environment for all Americans, and provided economic support to the coal industry. In addition, OSM and the States significantly revised OSM's approach to program oversight—instead of emphasizing a review of processes, OSM began focusing on measures and on the ground results. As a result of this management initiative, the OSM/State team received the prestigious Vice President's National Performance Review Hammer Award.

Customer Service

In 1998, OSM continued to increase its outreach efforts to work with all its stakeholders in an open-minded collaborative manner. In January 1998, OSM sponsored the Federal Coal Symposium in Washington D.C. This symposium was the largest event OSM has ever sponsored, as over 250 individuals attended, including stakeholders from government, industry, and environmental and citizens groups. The symposium served as an information sharing opportunity to foster a mutual understanding of current Federal programs affecting the coal industry and the remediation problems stemming from past coal mining practices. Additionally, OSM sponsored regional symposiums in each of its three regions to accommodate stakeholders in those parts of the country.

OSM held public meetings in Washington, D.C. and at 27 separate sessions in various coal field locations across the country to explain its fiscal year 1999 budget and to solicit stakeholders' views on the fiscal year 2000 budget submission. These meetings allowed attendees to gain additional knowledge about OSM program goals and available resources.

Government Performance and Results Act

The GPRA requires agencies to improve planning, eliminate duplicative processes, and involve stakeholders. Although it is a small bureau, OSM is in a perfect position to lead such coordinating/transfer endeavors. OSM deals with State and Federal agencies, administers Federal and private lands, reclaims and protects diverse sites, and enhances technology transfer among many constituents.

Goal: Better Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation - In 1998, 7,201 acres of land and water were reclaimed. While this is a shortfall of 799 acres from the annual goal of 8,000 acres, it represents an increase of 401 acres, or 5 percent, over 1997. In addition, more than 19,000 acres of pre-1977 abandoned mine waste piles have been restored to productive use. Over 2.7 million linear feet of dangerous cliff-like high walls have been eliminated, and more than 20,000 dangerous abandoned portals and hazardous vertical openings have been sealed.

The Office of Surface Mining experienced continuing success with the Appalachian Clean Streams Initiative, although the number of projects started in 1998 decreased compared to 1997. State funding for projects also decreased, from \$4 million in 1997 to approximately \$2.5 million in 1998. Several States were unable to finance new projects with their smaller 1998 allotment; consequently, some States used their 1998 Appalachian Clean Streams grants to continue or expand prior year projects.



Goal: Better Protection - Protecting people, property, and the environment is measured by the number of times incidents occur outside the boundaries of the permitted areas being mined. These are known as offsite impacts and the goal is to have no incidents occur. In 1998, 93 percent of the mine sites were free of offsite impacts. In the future, OSM will be working with States, Tribes, and the coal industry to strive for, and maintain, a minimum number of occurrences.



Before and after photos show the successful results of OSM's Cane Creek project (Walker County, Alabama). This project started in July 1997 and was completed in April 1998. Twenty miles of stream were improved, 20 acres of land were graded and reshaped, a pond dam was re-established, and portal and vertical openings were closed (photo by OSM).

The OSM is also measuring protection of the environment and people by assuring that the land currently being mined is properly reclaimed. This performance measure is the acreage of land that is released every year by active coal mine operators. This is accomplished through a series of bond releases. In 1998, OSM and the States released 74,237 acres from Phase I bonds, 70,943 acres from Phase II bonds, and 85,301 acres from Phase III bonds.

Goal: Better Operations - The Office of Surface Mining's financial statements were free of any material weaknesses concerning fee compliance, revenue, and grants management services as audited by the Office of the Inspector General. In light of its \$273 million budget and the estimated \$1.3 billion Abandoned Mine Land Fund it administers, OSM is proud of this accomplishment. This is the eighth year in a row that OSM has received an unqualified audit opinion on its financial statements.

The Abandoned Mine Land Fund, which is financed by the coal industry, provides funding to reclaim mined lands left abandoned prior to 1977 and eliminate emergency situations that arise from past mining practices. In 1998, a major portion of these funds provided for the reclamation of 7,201 hazardous acres of abandoned mine land, thus preventing injury to people and minimizing property damage.

In 1998, over 99 percent of coal companies required to report coal tonnage sales under the SMCRA fully complied with reporting requirements. The Office of Surface Mining will continue to work closely with coal companies to ensure that this high level of performance is maintained in the future.