

COAL SURFACE MINE REVEGETATION
IN THE EASTERN U.S.¹

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The Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 has provided a system of regulation that assures the revegetation of lands that have been surface mined for coal. However, this same system of regulation is, at times, too rigid and often prevents the utilization of known methods and vegetation systems that would be better for the environment, the local economy, and the efficiency of the coal mining operation. In most cases, the mining companies have concentrated on pleasing the regulatory agency by using vegetation and methods that will result in the least friction between the regulatory agency and the mining company. In many cases, this is not best for the environment, local economy or reclamation efficiency.

One example of the effect of the SMCRA on local economy is seen in Alabama. Before the passage of SMCRA, revegetation in Alabama consisted almost exclusively of reforestation. This was good for local economies since forestry is the leading industry in Alabama and provides much employment in the coal mining region. After the implementation of the SMCRA, most of the revegetation is accomplished with grasses and legumes. There is no grazing industry in the state and these grasses and legumes will slowly revert to a mixed forest of little economic value to the landowner.

There is a provision for Experimental Practices in Section 711 of the SMCRA. However, this section is seldom implemented. Researchers and mining companies should be encouraged to improve present revegetation practices through use of this provision.

¹Abstract of Mr. Lyle's remarks at the Plenary Session. His paper is available from Mr. William T. Plass, Executive Secretary, ASSMR, 21 Grandview Dr., Princeton, WV 24740

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