

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF MINING AND RECLAMATION<sup>1</sup>**

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**Introduction**

The American Society of Mining and Reclamation (ASMR) is a professional Society composed of about 400 current members. Our highest membership was around 1200 people during the period from 1988 to 1990. Members include representatives of various mining companies, consulting services, academic and research institutions, federal and state regulatory agencies, and students. About 90% of the membership resides in the USA and a review of the ASMR Directory indicates approximately 60% are affiliated with coal mining, 20% are involved in other mineral extractions or disturbances of land from construction of pipelines or highways, and the remainder as general service interests. Membership representing Australia/New Zealand, Europe, the Orient, Africa, and South America make up approximately 9% of the total Society membership, with an additional 2% from Canada. Regional membership in the United States is 44% east of the Mississippi and 56% in the west.

The objectives of the society are:

- A. To encourage communication among research scientists, the mining industry, regulatory agencies, and the general public with respect to mining and reclamation research and practices.
- B. To promote and support research relating to the reclamation of lands disturbed by mining as well as restoring the water quality related to such disturbances.
- C. To provide technical expertise to those agencies, organizations, or others who seek assistance in the development and execution of research, demonstration projects, or reclamation activities/projects.
- D. To promote and support educational programs relating to reclamation of lands disturbed by mineral extraction.

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<sup>1</sup> A more complete history is available on ASMR's web page <http://www.asmr.us> This includes an Expanded History written by Tom Zarger.  
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### **Original Organization**

The Society evolved from smaller organizations initially established in West Virginia. Foresighted individuals in the late 1960's recognized the importance that research could play in the development of mining and reclamation practices and policies, and in the mitigation of environmental impacts from mining.

In 1968, a tripartite agreement was reached among the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources - Division of Reclamation (Ben Greene, chief), the West Virginia Surface Mining and Reclamation Association (Dick Vande Linde, executive director), and the U.S. Forest Service (Bill Plass, reclamation researcher). These three parties agreed to form an advisory board to discuss reclamation research. The U.S. Forest Service established an office in Princeton, West Virginia and assigned Bill Plass to devote his position to mine land reclamation research. The three organizations requested assistance from the Soil Conservation Service (represented by Frank Glover) and West Virginia University (represented by Richard M. Smith). These five individuals composed the "Steering Committee for Surface Mine Research in West Virginia."



Figure 1. Reclamation Pioneers. These three gentlemen, Bill Plass (USDA Forest Service), Dick Vande Linde (WV Mining and Reclamation Association), and Ben Greene (WV Division of Natural Resources), were responsible for establishing the roots of the organization that would become the American Society of Mining and Reclamation (ASMR).

### **Organizational Growth**

The semi-annual meetings of the Steering Committee were publicized and soon became a popular forum for discussion of reclamation research. After two years, the number of participants

increased and representatives from surrounding states attended the meetings. It became apparent that such meetings were needed to disseminate research results, discuss mutual problems, and coordinate research programs. Since the concept proved successful in West Virginia, the Committee determined that a regional organization with similar objectives could succeed which was formed in Charleston, West Virginia on May 16, 1973. Ben Greene, chief of WV-DNR's Reclamation Division, invited representatives from WVSMRA (Ben Lusk, president), WVU, USDA-SCS, USDA-Forest Service, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Ohio Reclamation Association, and the Interstate Mining Compact Commission. A decision was made to form the "Council for Surface Mining and Reclamation in Appalachia." The basic objectives were to: 1) discuss current research; 2) identify research priorities; and 3) create opportunities for dissemination of reclamation technology. The Council continued to meet semi-annually within the Appalachian region and interest in the meetings expanded.

### **Expansion Again**

During this initial phase of the organization, there were two meetings per year. In November 1978, at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, the decision was made to extend the geographical base of the organization to the 100th meridian. The name was changed to the "American Council for Reclamation Research." Semi-annual meetings were held at locations in the Midwest and Appalachian regions. This group continued to meet twice a year for the next four years. During this period, reclamationists beyond this division in the western USA became interested, and their involvement in Council activities increased. In subsequent years, the entire USA was included in the Council.

### **National Organization**

The 1980's marked a period of rapid and significant growth, and the Council once again changed its name to reflect these activities in 1982. The "American Society for Surface Mining and Reclamation" (ASSMR) was established with two divisions, the Eastern and Western Divisions. This name change occurred under the leadership of Ralph Carter of the Argonne National Laboratory and was proposed at the meetings in Lexington, KY, although there were only 23 members west of the 100<sup>th</sup> meridian at the time, and was officially adopted in 1983 at the Denver meetings. A decision was made to hold the first meetings of ASSMR in 1984 in Owensboro, KY, which had over 200 in attendance with one from Australia. There were only 22

papers presented at these meetings, but the number of papers grew significantly over the years to follow.

The name was changed again in 2002 by close vote of the membership to its current one, “American Society of Mining and Reclamation,” or ASMR. The structure of the Society has changed some in the past few years with the adoption of new by-laws in 2002 and a modification of its governing board known as the National Executive Council or the NEC. Bill Plass served as the Executive Secretary over the early years of the organization (1984-1998). In 1999, Richard Barnhisel became the Executive Secretary and the Society office moved from Princeton, WV, to Lexington, KY.

The concept of Technical Divisions was developed in 1985 with the first being proposed by Dick Barth as the International Tailings Reclamation Division, and he along with Stu Bengson served as co-chairs. This provided an avenue in which interests of copper and uranium mining could be emphasized. The initial object was to seek solutions for the stabilization of tailings to reduce wind and water erosion. In subsequent years Technical Divisions for Soils and Overburden, Ecology, Forestry and Wildlife, Water Management, Geotechnical Engineering, and Land Use Planning and Design were established. Papers are currently organized under these technical divisions at our National Meetings.

Since the first meeting of ASSMR in 1984 in Owensboro, meetings have been held in 1985 in Denver, CO; 1986 in Jackson, MS; 1987 in Billings, MT; 1988 in Pittsburgh, PA; 1989 in Calgary AB; 1990 Charleston, WV; 1991 in Durango, CO; 1992 in Duluth, MN; 1993 in Spokane, WA; 1994 in Pittsburgh, PA; 1995 in Gillette, WY; 1996 in Knoxville, TN; 1997 in Austin, TX; 1998 in St. Louis, MO; 1999 in Scottsdale, AZ; 2000 in Tampa, FL; 2001 in Albuquerque, NM; 2002 in Lexington, KY; 2003 in Billings, MT; 2004 in Morgantown, WV; 2005 in Breckenridge, CO; 2006 in St. Louis, MO (ICARD) and Billings, MT (BLRS); 2007 in Gillette, WY; 2008 in Richmond, VA; 2009 in Billings, MT; 2010 in Pittsburgh, PA; 2011 in Bismarck, ND; and 2012 in Tupelo, MS.

### **Continued Growth**

The National meeting is the largest and most important annual event for the Society. Each year the location is rotated between eastern and western North America to provide opportunities for its members and guests to become familiar with diverse reclamation challenges and

accomplishments. Field trips highlight those differences and unique aspects of reclamation at the meeting location. The Proceedings for the meetings provide valuable references for those concerned with land reclamation and is the Society's most important product. Copies of past proceedings in the form of CDs are available for a nominal fee, but are also available online by visiting the ASMR web page [www.asmr.us](http://www.asmr.us).

Reclamation Matters is a bi-annual magazine published since 2004 by the Society. It is composed of articles of general interest from the proceedings and includes announcements of upcoming national meetings, award winners, and other matters of society interest.

Various other publications have been developed and revised over time such as: Guidelines for Conducting Annual Meetings; Preparation of Manuscripts; Guidelines for Peer Review of Manuscripts; Guidelines for Preparing Posters. The Society is in the process of developing an online Journal. This will be a peer reviewed Journal as has been the case for the Proceedings for the past ten years of its existence.

The Society offers membership in the following levels: Student (part-time and full time); Regular (at either the Annual or Life levels), Corporate (at either the Annual or Life levels), and Sustaining. Membership rates may be found on the ASMR web page.

### **Society Awards**

Several awards are offered by the Society, and a complete listing of these awards may be found on the ASMR web page. Initially, in 1984 a "Special Award" category was established to be given to the person who had contributed greatly to the Society and this was given to Mr. Don Eagleston for his work in organizing and promoting the first ASSMR meetings in Owensboro, KY. This award has been given to various non-members and members periodically over the years. Also in 1984 an Award established for the Reclamationist of the Year was made to Mr. James White. The third award established in 1984 was for the Researcher of the Year with Dr. Ronald E. Ries being the first recipient. The name of this award was later changed as the result of a significant donation to the Society by Richard and Lela Barnhisel to provide a monetary award to the recipient and the name was changed to the Richard and Lela Barnhisel Researcher of the Year Award. In 1990 the William T. Plass Award was established with Mr. Benjamin Greene being the first recipient. The Plass award is considered the highest award given by the Society.

Monetary awards are currently given to all categories except the Special Award level. These awards are generated from interest earned from specific financial endowments.

In addition to these awards, the Society provides scholarships at the B.S., M.S., and PhD levels to qualified recipients. Travel Grants are also awarded to qualifying students, as well as awards for both oral and poster presentations given by students at the annual meetings. Recipients of these awards may be found on the ASMR web page.

### **Technical Divisions**

Society programs and projects recognize the multidisciplinary nature of land reclamation and provide opportunities for those with specialized interests to organize workshops, prepare special sessions for the National meetings, and publish handbooks and manuals. As mentioned earlier, these efforts currently are organized under seven Technical Divisions. Technical Divisions are: Ecology, Forestry/Wildlife, Geotechnical Engineering, International Tailings Reclamation, Land Use Planning and Design, Soils/Overburden, and Water Management. Some of these technical divisions have not been as active as others the past few years, but with the advent of the new Journal it is anticipated that some of these more or less dormant technical divisions will spring back into life.

The basic objective of these divisions is to keep the membership informed of basic and applied science in reclamation technology, both nationally and internationally. The Society's goal is also to provide a mechanism to encourage both written and verbal technology transfer.

### **International Relationships**

The formation of the International Affiliation of Land Reclamationists (IALR) has evolved as a means to expedite technology transfer between members of similar organizations and interests in Canada, China, Australia, Great Britain, and the United States. All members of ASMR are automatically affiliate members of the IALR as well. This organization has its own web page <http://www.landrehab.org/IALR> .