

OFFICE OF SURFACE MINING RECLAMATION AND ENFORCEMENT APPALACHIAN REGIONAL REFORESTATION INITIATIVE¹

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Abstract. The Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative is a broad-based citizen/industry/government program working to encourage planting trees on reclaimed mined lands and abandoned mine lands. Using a combination of private and governmental resources, the program will facilitate and coordinate citizen groups, university researchers, the coal industry, corporations, the environmental community, and local, state, and federal government agencies that have an interest in creating productive forestland on reclaimed mined lands.

Research by Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and the University of Kentucky has confirmed that highly productive forestland can be created on reclaimed mine land by using a forestry reclamation approach. The Office of Surface Mining (OSM) has determined that this technology can be implemented under the current federal regulations. The Forestry Reclamation Approach has five fundamental parts:

1. Create a new soil medium by replacing the original soil with four feet of surface soil, weathered sandstone, or the best available material.
2. Loosely grade the topsoil or topsoil substitutes to create a noncompacted soil growth medium.
3. Use native and noncompetitive ground covers that are compatible with growing trees.
4. Plant two types of trees – early successional species for wildlife and mine soil improvement and commercially valuable crop trees.
5. Use proper tree planting techniques.

Tree planting is documented throughout Appalachia in the regulatory programs in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee, and West Virginia. Although trees are being planted, the reclamation plans generally do not reflect the current technology. Our mission is to promote and encourage the use of the Forestry Reclamation Approach technology in both Title IV and Title V programs.

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