

# REGULATION AND RECLAMATION OF SURFACE MINES IN WASHINGTON

by

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**Abstract:** The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) administers the Washington Surface Mining Act (Chapter 78.44 RCW) and is responsible for ensuring that reclamation follows completion of surface mining on private and non-federal public lands.

Approximately 2,300 surface mining permits have been issued since 1971 in Washington. Nearly 1,250 permits are still active. Surface mining permits have been issued for: sand and gravel aggregate and quarried stone; volcanic ash from Mount St. Helens; industrial minerals such as dolomite, limestone, marble, clay, silica, diatomite, and olivine; peat, coal, and precious and base metals.

Mined areas larger than 3 acres are required to have a surface mining permit and to follow an approved reclamation plan which considers subsequent land use. The reclaimed mine is expected to blend with the surrounding landforms where possible.

Typical uses of reclaimed mines are as wetlands and lakes, upland wildlife habitat, productive forests, residential, industrial, commercial agricultural, and recreational sites. For many subsequent uses of the mine; topsoil must be saved and the site revegetated.

Revegetation includes planting grasses and legumes, and where appropriate, trees and shrubs to control erosion, provide slope stability, wildlife habitat, and reduce the rectilinear appearance common in most mines. The wet, mild climate of western Washington makes it generally easy to establish vegetation. Due to the difference in climate between western and eastern Washington, revegetation techniques also differ.

RCW 78.44 requires that segmental reclamation occur after depletion of minerals in each sector of the mine. Advantages of segmental reclamation over reclamation after completion of all operations are lower cost and more successful and complete reclamation.

**Key Words:** Washington, RCW 78.44, segmental reclamation, revegetation, subsequent land use, aggregate, quarried stone, industrial minerals.

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