

PROPOSAL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A WESTERN STATES LAND RECLAMATION CENTER¹

George F. Vance²

Abstract: A Western States Land Reclamation Center with programs in reclamation science and restoration ecology would provide the needed expertise to the western U.S. through problem solving, training and technology transfer. Both the strength of our economy and the quality of life for western state citizens depends upon the viability and sustainability of our natural resources and environment. Land disturbance due to human activities such as mining, urban sprawl and road construction, and from natural events including fire, wind and water erosion and drought require a better understanding of how disturbed ecosystems can be functionally restored. Programs that focus on these concerns are essential to the preservation and improvement of our western lands. The Center will provide a focus that would help manage and protect terrestrial and aquatic resources for future use, solve problems facing the western states such as coalbed methane impacts, provide education and training opportunities and interact with agencies and the public on concerns involving reclamation issues. The Center would consist of multi-disciplinary reclamation and restoration ecology fact-finding, educational and outreach programs that focus on the identification, assessment and rehabilitation of disturbed ecosystems. Coordinated efforts involving research and education endeavors would provide a more efficient use of resources, help centralize western states cooperative research funding in the area of ecosystem reclamation, attract grant support through enhanced national and international visibility and provide services to the agricultural, mineral and energy economic base of the western U.S. through enhanced science and technology.

The mission of the Center would be to pursue and disseminate impartial, scientifically-based information related to the reclamation, rehabilitation and restoration of disturbed ecosystems, to educate students so that they will be able to analyze, synthesize and integrate findings, results and related research for use in protecting and improving western state's ecosystems and to serve as a resource for citizens and communities, state and federal agencies, and private industries requiring assistance in reclamation science and ecological restoration endeavors. The primary goal of the Center would be to achieve prominent recognition as a state-of-the-art resource center for investigating research problems and developing solutions to issues and challenges confronting western state's citizens, communities, agencies and private industries. An Advisory Board comprised of stakeholder groups - industry, regulatory agencies, and environmental advocacy groups - as well as scientists, policy makers, public and private land managers and interested citizens, would assist a Center Director in setting priorities, identifying needs and developing research, education and outreach programs.

Additional Key Words: Revegetation, Mining, Federal Support

¹Paper was presented at the 2003 National Meeting of the American Society of Mining and Reclamation and the 9th Billings Land Reclamation Symposium, Billings MT, June 3-6, 2003. Published by ASMR, 3134 Montavesta Rd., Lexington, KY 40502.

²George F. Vance, J.E. Warren Distinguished Professor of Energy and the Environment, Department of Renewable Resources, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY 82071-3354, (307) 766-2297, gfv@uwyo.edu