

Testimony SJ 4

Resolution to Reauthorize of Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. My name is Bill Snoddy. I am a Project Officer with the Department of Environmental Quality's Abandoned Mine Lands Program. I am here today representing the Department in support of Senate Joint Resolution 4; a resolution to reauthorize the collection of fees for reclamation of abandoned mine lands under Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977, or SMCRA.

SMCRA establishes oversight of operating coal mines and requires their reclamation, it also provides for the collection a fee on every ton of coal mined in the United States to fund abandoned mine reclamation. Half of the fees collected are distributed to the state where the coal was produced by the Federal Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE). Each state receives money in the form of a grant to fund reclamation of land and water disturbed by abandoned mines which have no responsible party, and were abandoned before August 3, 1977.

The Abandoned Mine Lands Program, a section of the DEQ Waste Management and Remediation Division, is the recipient of Montana's annual federal grant. The Program's priority is reclamation of hazards associated with abandoned coal mines. The Program is also allowed to address hardrock abandoned mine hazards placing the priority on emergencies. The AML Program is instrumental in providing the citizens of the State with a clean and healthful environment. Abandoned mines pose serious safety hazards to people, livestock, and wildlife. Water discharged from abandoned mines is frequently polluted and acidic. When entering Montana's waterways, it can destroy fish and avian habitat, contaminate irrigation water, and harm a valuable source of recreation. Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, it is important to emphasize that Montana's operating coal mines have not created problems addressed by the AML Program. In fact, operating mines fund the cleanup of historic coal mining sites.

Continuation of the AML fee collection requires Congressional action before SMCRA expires in 2021. This resolution will solidify Montana's support of continued funding of the nation's abandoned mine land programs. The AML Program is staffed with 4.5 full time personnel and receives a base grant of \$4 million annually. The grant amounts are dependent on coal production in Montana and are subject to sequestration. Administration of the program is less than 10% of the annual grant. This includes staff time and the resources needed to support AML work. The remaining 90% of our grant pays for professional engineering services and construction contracts.

Montana has 3,200 known abandoned coal mines ranging from small wagon mines to large production mines that supplied railroads and cities. Montana also has over 3,800 hardrock and other abandoned mines (bentonite and sand and gravel). Abandoned mines can be found in 52 of our 56 counties.

Since the program was established it has

- Extinguished 16 coal mine fires
- Closed 1631 hazardous mine openings
- Reclaimed 31 miles of streams and 157 acres of land contaminated by mine waste
- Spent \$17.5 million reclaiming polluted waters

The AML Program is currently working on several major projects as well as continued routine reclamation work. Some of these projects:

Carrie Mine Subsidence Emergency Program – Butte - The total cost is estimated over \$100,000

Belt Water Treatment Plant – Belt MT - Cost will be about \$9 million for construction and \$500 thousand per year for operation and maintenance.

Bair-Collins and Jefferies #18 Mines – Roundup, MT - This multi-year project will cost about \$3 million.

Subsidence Remediation and Mine Inventory – Statewide - At this time there are over 100 known subsidence features on private land that need to be reclaimed and more are found every year. Additionally, routine site inventory of the abandoned mines in Montana is an ongoing process.

The AML Program in Montana plays a vital role in reclaiming property damaged by the unintentional consequences of mining. If it were not for the AML Program private property owners, whose land has been adversely affected by abandoned mines, would have no other recourse for assistance.

I urge you vote do pass on SJ 4.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Bill Snoddy
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Montana Abandoned Mine Lands Program