

BLUE CREEK GOB
ABANDONED MINE LAND
RECLAMATION PROJECT

Johns (Jefferson County), Alabama

Started: September 1997

Completed: May 2001

Contractors: 1) R&S Resource Recovery
Jasper, Alabama
2) Walker County Soil & Water
Conservation District Board

Cost: \$80,294.00

Submitted by:

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Alabama AML Program Eliminates Public Safety Hazards, Acid Mine Drainage through No Cost Contracting

The challenge: how, on a limited budget, to correct an assortment of nightmarish public safety hazards and environmental problems stemming from 40 acres of abandoned coal refuse (gob) material stacked alongside Blue Creek in Jefferson County, Alabama.

Dangerous embankments, landslides, gob fires, toxic materials, acid mine drainage. In a scene reminiscent of Dante s Inferno , Alabama s Blue Creek Gob site had them all. Conventional reclamation would be too expensive, and although the gob contained some marketable coal, there was no interest in remining the site. So the answer would lie in increasing the amount of reclamation without increasing the cost to Alabama s AML Fund.

Previously, extraction of coal from this type of site could be considered an incidental part of government-financed construction. But government-financed construction would require that the project be funded 50% or more by State operating funds. In a case such as Blue Creek, where the anticipated proceeds from the sale of incidental coal were expected to be 50% or greater of the total project cost - a level that would have reduced the State s contribution below the 50% floor - this funding requirement discouraged AML reclamation.

The AML Enhancement Rule, adopted into State mining regulations April 20, 2000, modified the definition of government-financed construction to eliminate the 50% funding requirement, so long as there is no possibility of remining, the area to be reclaimed is clearly delineated, the work is adequately bonded, and certain licensing requirements are met. Now, for sites with substantial deposits of incidental coal, the anticipated sale of such coal results in lower project bid prices, which, in turn, reduce the State s share of the total cost of the project. As a result, less public funding is required for these sites to accomplish the same level of AML reclamation. By reducing the State s share of the cost of reclamation, AML money becomes available for other AML reclamation projects that would otherwise not be funded.

The Blue Creek Gob site was perfectly suited for reclamation under the AML Enhancement Rule. Under a no-cost contract between the State and R&S Resource Recovery, Inc. of Jasper, Alabama, over 200,000 cubic yards of gob were excavated from problematic areas and transported to a permitted processing facility. Marketable coal was removed and sold, allowing the contractor to perform grading at no cost to the State. Washer waste is being handled separately and reclaimed at a properly designed disposal site. Under a second cooperative agreement, the Walker County Soil and Water Conservation District Board was reimbursed by the State for treating acid mine drainage and revegetating the project. The project area will ultimately be reforested.

Over \$500,000 worth of reclamation was accomplished with the only cost to the State being \$80,294. Under the AML Enhancement Rule, the contractor makes a profit, the government saves money and - most important of all - additional abandoned sites that the State could not afford to reclaim in the past will be reclaimed.

Blue Creek Gob AML Project
Jefferson County, Alabama

PHOTO CAPTIONS

1. State officials look at extremely dangerous, 40-foot vertical embankment in coal refuse (gob) material clogging Blue Creek. Acid mine drainage from the material has poisoned aquatic habitat. ATV and motorcycle tracks crisscross the flat top of this gob area, coming to within inches of the drop-off. Anyone accidentally driving or falling off the unstable edge would be seriously injured or killed.
2. Reclamation in progress. Gob is removed and transported to a permitted processing facility. Any marketable coal is removed and sold under AML Enhancement Rule, allowing contractor to perform work at no cost to the State.
3. (Cover photo). Reclamation complete. Grading and drainage control provided by resource recovery contractor. Soil amendments and revegetation provided by Walker County Soil and Water Conservation District Board. The site will eventually be reforested.

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