

AN EVALUATION OF RECLAMATION TREE PLANTING
IN SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA

PRESENTED AT

TREES FOR RECLAMATION IN THE EASTERN UNITED STATES

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Surface mining began in Southwest Virginia in the mid-1940's, however, few or no records were kept before 1950 and it was not until 1966 that the first Virginia reclamation law was passed. Two years later in 1968, the Division of Mined Land Reclamation was created and tree planting began on a uniform basis in Virginia surface mines.

Historically, however, tree planting was one of the first general reclamation techniques on coal surface mined lands and many plantings were done prior to 1968 by various coal operators, Soil Conservation Service personnel, personnel of the Virginia Division of Forestry and others. The much used practice of sowing black locust seed on earlier reclamation areas should also be noted.

From a lowly beginning then in 1968 of 1,000 tree seedlings planted, to a high of just over four million seedlings planted in 1975, and 1980's total through June of 76,000 tree seedlings planted, the coal surface mining operators of Virginia have continued to plant seedlings. (Table 1). The decrease from 1975 to 1980 coincides with a corresponding decrease in acreage disturbed due to decreased mining activity because of a depressed coal market and/or increased regulation.

Current permit figures also reflect a recent trend towards a post mine land use of hay and/or pasture.

Table 1.--Tree Seedling Information Report

Calendar Year	Operating Permits Issued	Acres Disturbed	Acres Reclaimed	Number Tree Seedling
1966				
Coal	62	200.76	62.20	0
NOTC	0	0	0	0
1967				
Coal	74	1,660.45	1,326.85	0
NOTC	0	0	0	0
1968				
Coal	74	2,702.56	2,008.22	1,000.00
NOTC	0	0	0	0
1969				
Coal	103	2,763.95	1,915.70	21,895.00
NOTC	169	0	0	0
1970				
Coal	175	2,895.48	2,682.54	98,200.00
NOTC	36	0	0	119,108.00
1971				
Coal	186	5,322.59	3,013.12	159,574.00
NOTC	19	6,197.75	346.97	75,047.00
1972				
Coal	253	6,539.80	5,931.50	696,380.00
NOTC	44	6,805.10	531.28	107,096.00
1973				
Coal	193	5,898.11	6,091.41	1,324,580.00
NOTC	39	7,479.92	710.26	10,410.00
1974				
Coal	358	5,692.13	5,680.63	2,163,892.00
NOTC	38	9,008.18	1,148.89	17,353.00
1975				
Coal	321	9,381.80	7,490.24	4,060,568.00
NOTC	19	10,310.01	1,482.43	27,880.00
1976				
Coal	258	10,084.47	9,508.19	3,258,507.00
NOTC	26	970.59	550.57	26,598.00
1977				
Coal	264	8,080.91	6,895.18	2,137,887.00
NOTC	36	1,865.55	244.48	89,830.00
OL-TVA			2,704.97	621,465.00
1978				
Coal	373	8,614.85	9,602.09	1,902,030.00
NOTC	35	967.99	223.26	35,480.00
OL-TVA			2,154.42	478,215.00
1979				
Coal	248	4,126.89	7,368.58	2,926,500.00
NOTC	36	805.17	104.91	81,000.00
OL-TVA			1,488.30	1,381,230.00
1980 - (Thru June)				
Coal	58	1,698.31	4,048.45	476,050.00
NOTC				
OL-TVA			428.30	672,450.00

As of the 58 surface mine permits issued thus far in 1980, fifteen have requested a hay and/or pasture type post mine land use. This compares with twelve of 248 permits issued in all of 1979.

During the past five years, the Virginia Division of Mined Land Reclamation has also participated in the federally funded Abandoned Land Reclamation Program with the Tennessee Valley Authority. This program was designed to provide for intensive tree and shrub planting, seeding and limited regrading of abandoned mine lands, mined and abandoned before the states involved passed surface mining and reclamation laws. This would provide long term soil stabilization, blend the "orphan" land with the surrounding landscape and provide additional benefits of forest and wildlife production.

Thus from its initiation in 1975 until its termination on August 10, 1980, this program provided for the planting of approximately 3,650,000 tree and shrub seedlings with an approximate projected 45-50 percent survival rate.

The Division of Mined Land Reclamation is indebted for the past cooperation of the Virginia Division of Forestry, the Soil Conservation Service, coal mine operators, the U. S. Forest Service and their experimental stations, and others for their continued cooperation in the tree planting program.

It is hoped as this cooperative effort continues on coal surface mined land where forestry is designated as the post mine land use, we will truly be involved in reforestation, not just tree planting for reclamation on Virginia surface mined lands.