

Lignite Mining & Reclamation Process

- Increased surface mining in the early 1900s led to passage of the first reclamation laws in the 1930s in the East
- There are still 14,000 acres of abandoned mined lands or “orphan spoils” still in North Dakota. Much of this land is managed by the Game & Fish Department for wildlife habitat and hunting
- Regulatory Developments
 - o **1969 - North Dakota Strip Mined Lands Act**
 - o **1971 - Grade spoils to accommodate farm machinery**
 - o **1973 - Save and replace topsoil**
 - o **1975 - Mined lands must be returned to 100% of pre-mine productivity**
- The Federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) was passed in 1977
 - o The US Department of the Interior oversees the Office Of Surface Mining which oversees the North Dakota Public Service Commission
- Determining where to establish a coal mine:
 - o Minimum of 10 feet cumulative thickness in not more than two beds
 - o More than 25 feet beneath the surface
 - o Not more than 175 feet beneath the surface
 - o A stripping ratio of not more than 10:1 (not more than 10 feet of overburden per every foot of coal)
- Two mining methods: Underground Mining and Surface Mining
- Process of mining and reclamation
 - o **1. Obtain mining rights and regulatory approvals**
 - o **2. Establish water management**
 - o **3. Remove topsoil and subsoil**
 - o **4. Move overburden and remove coal**
 - o **5. Grade spoils to approximate original contour**
 - o **6. Spread subsoil and topsoil and seed with grasses or crops**
 - o **7. Obtain bond release**
- Mining companies have 3 years after the coal removal to grade and seed the land.
- North Dakota coal mines have released more than 20,000 acres from bond.