

C.L.R.A. CONFERENCE - APRIL 17, 1985
RECLAMATION CERTIFICATION AND CRITERIA

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Alberta Environment

With the passing of the Surface Reclamation Act in 1963 criteria for land reclamation and subsequent certification was at its beginning stage. During those early years, the main thrust for reclamation was concentrated on the oil and gas industry which included wellsites, access roadways, battery sites and pipelines located on surveyed lands. The criteria for reclamation certification in those days was for industry to leave the land in the condition that would not interfere with farming operations, in that the land would be levelled and contoured to as close as it was prior to the operation occurring and all rocks and debris would be removed. There was no requirement for operators to pre-strip, salvage or replace topsoil or to ensure growth capability.

This same basic criteria was required by coal operators and it wasn't until 1973 that legislation was put in place that required coal, oil sands and other operators to plan conservation and reclamation methods and submit plans to the government for review. Therefore, conservation and reclamation became an integral part of mining operations. From the Land Surface Conservation and Reclamation Act came specific regulations for Coal, Oil Sands, Pipelines and Sand and Gravel Operations. The review process for development is set out in the Act and Regulations and the setting up of the Development and Reclamation Review Committee was the first big step in developing the capacity to (evaluate) conservation and reclamation criteria to be followed by coal and oil sands operators to ensure proper reclamation upon abandonment of the operation. Upon completion of the review of the application and plans for development and reclamation, a Development and Reclamation Approval is issued by the Minister and this document is the basis that would be used for future criteria for reclamation certification. This procedure sets criteria for the operator and also assists the Reclamation Officer in his inspections and in his decisions when a request for a reclamation certificate is received.

Since we started issuing Development and Reclamation Approvals for coal mines in 1974 we have issued Reclamation Certificates to Forestburg Collieries Limited at the Diplomat Mine, TransAlta Utilities Corporation on their Whitewood Mine, Cardinal River Coals Ltd. and Coleman Collieries Limited. I would emphasize that our standards for reclamation are not retroactive therefore any one mine might have several areas that would possibly be reclaimed to three different levels depending upon when the disturbance occurred or when the approval was issued. In the issuing of the certificates, because the requirement to obtain a Development and Reclamation Approval did not come into effect until 1974, our decision was based on the criteria in place at the time the disturbance occurred being pre-1963, 1963 to 1973, 1973 to 1976 and 76 to present. Pre-1963 there was no legislation in place, therefore certification was not required for lands abandoned prior to 1963. From 1963 to 1973 basic land levelling and removal of hazards was all that was required. Between 1973 and 1976 more emphasis was on land levelling, erosion control and leaving the land in a condition that would support growth.

From 1976 to the present the conditions of the Development and Reclamation Approval dictated the requirement of conserving and replacing of topsoil, restoring drainage and ensuring proper growth. This is laid down in definition of reclamation in the Coal Policy. Which reads, "the primary objective in land reclamation is to ensure that the mined or disturbed land will be returned to a state which will support plant and animal life or be otherwise productive or useful to man at least to the degree it was before it was disturbed". To achieve this objective we are using the best knowledge of industry, government and research being applied based on experience in Alberta and the extrapolation of available data.

To ensure that proper conservation and reclamation procedures are followed, regular inspections are made by Reclamation Officers of the Council. While the Reclamation Officer is responsible for the issuance of the certificates, staff in Edmonton are available to them if assistance is needed in the area of agrology, water resources hydrology, etc.

We have found that conservation and reclamation practices followed by operators, in preparation for obtaining certification has improved greatly since 1963. We feel that this is directly attributable to the efforts made by all parties to communicate on matters relating to conservation and reclamation procedures. This was accomplished by holding meetings, workshops or being involved in research projects and field trips. Through this communication we were able to realize that at times changes are required and in the past we have had occasion to make beneficial changes.

I would also like to mention that we are quite pleased with the success rates of reclamation on non-regulated operations such as wellsites, access roads and small pipelines. Since no Development and Reclamation Approval is required, the minimum Reclamation Requirements for Public and Private lands in Alberta are the criteria used and we found that use of these standards has helped to overcome many of the initial concerns we had regarding reclamation matters.

In the future when more mined lands have been reclaimed we will have a better opportunity to realize whether the conservation and reclamation methods required by the Approval are in fact working. This will then reflect back on the overall criteria being applied by the Council and their adequacy.

We welcome and appreciate receiving reports from industry, surface owners or any agency that would assist us in improving future conservation and reclamation methods.

I have asked two of the Reclamation Officers of the Council to present two different surface disturbance situations that will illustrate our view points on reclamation criteria and success. The first is Bob Onciul out of our St. Paul Office, who will speak on pipelines and the second is Doug Beddome from our Edson Office, who will speak on coal mines.

PROCEEDINGS

ALBERTA RECLAMATION CONFERENCES

1985
Planning and Certification
of Land Reclamation
April 16-17, 1985
Edmonton Inn, Edmonton

1986
Reclamation in the
Eastern Slopes of Alberta
September 25-26, 1986
Overlander Lodge, Hinton

C.B. Powter
R.J. Fessenden
D.G. Walker
Compilers



ALBERTA CHAPTER

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CANADIAN LAND RECLAMATION ASSOCIATION

P R O C E E D I N G S

1985 AND 1986

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Most of the work, however, was done by the speakers who prepared the papers and delivered the talks to us and we offer them a strong vote of thanks.

Last, but not least, thanks to the two hotels for excellent accommodations and facilities.

For more information on the Alberta Chapter or the Canadian Land Reclamation Association please write to CLRA, Box 682, Guelph, Ontario, Canada N1H 6L3.

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