

APPLICATION OF POPULATION BIOLOGY, CONSERVATION BIOLOGY AND SUCCESSION THEORY TO THE RECLAMATION OF A HIGH ELEVATION COAL MINE¹

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INTRODUCTION

Alternative reclamation approaches that involve 'minimal intervention' or aftercare may be necessary for high elevation disturbances. For these remote area disturbances, reclamation plans and practices should develop abiotic and biotic conditions that promote 'natural' succession by enhancing invasion and colonization of different microorganisms, plant life-forms and animal species (Brown and Chambers 1990). However, reliance on 'natural' restorative processes for reclamation is constrained by disturbance intensity and size (Pratt and Stevens 1992). Also, the successional status prior to disturbance and species in last occupancy often determines the most likely sequence of arrival and magnitude of colonization by invaders (Mortimer 1987).

Propagules arrive at potential growth sites by various dispersal processes and the configuration of donor sites or sources on the landscape determines frequently the distribution of propagules at the recipient site (Risser 1992). 'Natural' colonization from the periphery of disturbances is dependent upon the presence of sufficiently large populations of species with suitable life histories and the absence of dispersal barriers. Large surface mining activities frequently create landforms, e.g., highwalls and large spoil dumps, which do not have appropriate colonizing species in close proximity or which act as barriers to dispersal. Although colonization of these disturbances has been reported (Macyk et al. 1991), species establishment appears to be inconsistent. Since the recovery rate of primary succession is largely dependent on the rate of propagule arrival and on the reproductive potential of the invaders (Okansen and Ranta 1991), management techniques must be designed to maximize propagule dispersal.

Lessons from biogeography suggest that colonization by some desirable species cannot be left to 'natural processes' and that species with poor dispersal propagules and/or long life histories must be 'artificially' re-introduced (Davis 1986). Dispersal of both plants and animals can be facilitated by managing sites as 'corridors' or 'stepping stones'.

MANAGEMENT MODEL DESCRIPTION

Manipulation of populations is considered the logical choice for 'succession management' (Luken 1990). Therefore, a descriptive model was proposed and is being implemented at a coal mine in British Columbia. The core/satellite management model draws extensively on the stage-based population (metapopulation) dynamics of plants inhabiting patchy environments, metacommunity persistence and landscape ecology processes. The model can be visualized as an array of strategically positioned and intensively managed native seed production and/or wildlife habitat patches embedded within a matrix of seeded agronomic species. The model assumes that multiple disjunct foci or satellites which originate from the introduced or remnant patches (cores) and the adjacent undisturbed landscape will provide colonists for the matrix. In turn, colonization and expansion from the nascent foci (satellites) will facilitate the species replacement process within the matrix. The function of the matrix is soil development, erosion control and facilitation of fauna migration. Establishment of patches and the matrix are designed to be functionally integrated in order to maximize ecological interactions both within the disturbed area and between disturbed and non-disturbed areas. The model attempts to include, where possible, manipulation of all components of the successional process and is based on maximizing satellite colonization of the matrix by patch species as well as stimulating expansionary diffusion from patches. Incorporation of the spatial processes at the landscape level provides

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the opportunity for planning which facilitates colonization and migration throughout the entire post-mining landscape as well as through the adjacent undisturbed landscape. Plant-animal interactions and their manipulation are considered essential.

Relationship of Core/Satellite Colonization Model to Successional Theory

Conceptually, the proposed management model incorporates the theories of species colonization described by Moody and Mack (1988), the patch models of Czrn and Bartha (1992), and the combined pool/corridor model of Merriam et al. (1990). The model is also analogous to the multi-cell loose equilibrium model of DeAngelis et al. (1985) in that it assumes that the entire system operates within a non-equilibrium status although metastability may exist at certain temporal and spatial scales. The non-equilibrium assumption of the model is derived from the low durational stability experienced by small patches (Pickett et al. 1989). The model assumes that persistent ecological entities such as patches have a minimal structure requirement (population size, patch structure and configuration) that permits persistence.

The descriptive model of Moody and Mack (1988) is the first component of the management model and describes the major mechanism of matrix colonization. Multiple disjunct foci or satellites originating from the introduced patches or, if present, from remnant patches or adjacent undisturbed lands, will provide the initial colonists of the matrix. Satellites may be the result of independent introductions from an initial source, of dispersal and repeated establishment of colonists from the initial source, or of a combination of both. The satellites are essentially metapopulations and could establish potentially during each growing season. The factors that contribute to the spread of invading plants are regulated largely by the dynamics of satellite stands rather than by the expansion of the initially large stand. Thus, the rate of spread of desirable species might be enhanced by concentrating resources, e.g., seed and fertilizer, to facilitate the development of satellites that could produce seed for natural dispersal. The establishment of 'intensively managed patches' of native species could function as nuclei for seed production and/or sources of propagules for the surrounding landscape and would facilitate plant successional development over the entire landscape. Furthermore, these patches would stimulate heterotrophic succession through the provision of wildlife habitat.

The model of Moody and Mack (1988) is most applicable, though not restricted, to species with more specialized mechanisms of dispersal where colonization takes place more as isolated individuals. Where the density of seed dispersal declines sharply with distance, it is likely that the population will colonize as an advancing front either through individual colonization or diffusion. The group of processes that involve dispersal or spread are different mechanisms from processes of diffusion where some attribute such as seeds or rametes are dispersed through a fixed population matrix.

The patch models of Czrn and Bartha (1992) address specifically localized or smaller scale interactions of plant populations. The dynamics in this patch model are colonizations and extinctions within and between patches. Patch models assume that populations grow and interact in a number of finite topographical regions (habitat patches) which are separated by a continuous area (matrix) that is uninhabitable but more or less penetrable. Patch models also allow for population diffusion via small scale immigration of seedlings or clonal species expansion from the perimeter of patches.. This concept is important in the expansion and coalescence of patches at a more spatially restricted scale.

At the landscape level, the spatial relationships of the management model can best be described by a combination of the corridor and non-corridor models (Merriam et al. 1990). Corridor models assume patch connectivity and link logically plant succession with heterotrophic succession. Metapopulation size is related not only to quality of the particular patch and the number of other patches to which it is connected but also to the quality of adjacent patches. For those species requiring corridors, connectivity within the post-mining landscape would be facilitated by the continued existence of haul roads functioning as migration routes or as vectors between source and disjunct patches.

Patch Establishment - Plant Species Selection

Plant succession research indicates that the inclusion of different lifeforms (vertical and horizontal structure) in seeding and planting mixtures, together with appropriate amendments may increase phylogenetic

and structural diversity of revegetation communities and enhance rates of successional development (Chambers et al. 1988). Since the process of internal regulation is crucial to the maintenance of biotic diversity in ecologically isolated patches (Pickett et al. 1989), the 'functional group' selection and size of each patch must be based on ecosystem as well as metapopulation dynamics. Therefore, species with suitable 'vital attributes' (morphological, physiological, ecological) or those belonging to appropriate 'functional groups' are selected and combined to develop arrays of different 'biotic type' patches (metacommunities).

The accessions used in the metapopulation establishment should mimic the genetic variability of the donor population (Lippitt et al. 1994) in order to reduce the possibility of 'founder effects'. Re-established metapopulation numbers should approximate 10^3 - 10^6 individuals (Shaffer 1987), except where extant *in situ* (remnant patches) or *ex situ* sub-populations are within, or in close proximity to, the surface mine disturbance. In many cases, an effective population size of 500 individuals is adequate (Kesseli 1992).

Patch Establishment - Planning for Colonization and Dispersal

Knowledge of seed dispersal patterns and processes is essential to the spatial configuration design of patches within the matrix. Although reclaimed landscapes seldom correspond spatially to pre-disturbance conditions, there are commonalities which must be considered and planned for when implementing such a management program. 'Natural' as well as post-mining landscapes have spatial diversity with horizontal and vertical boundaries. Understanding the effects of landforms at the landscape ecology level is crucial to the development of an integrative reclamation program (Tueller 1992). As well, the incorporation of temporal and spatial processes external to the mine disturbance are fundamental to the long-term sustainability of reconstructed ecological systems under which minimal management intervention is anticipated.

From a 'controlled colonization' perspective, several management practices can increase propagule dispersal. The most obvious management activity is to increase recruitment by configuring the spatial arrangement of the patches within each landscape type (highwall, dump free face or platform) in order to reduce required seed dispersal distances and increase seed rain density. The direct placement of recently excavated topsoil onto disturbed sites as the pits 'daylight' in mountainous terrain might also re-establish patches of seed bank species.

Since the spatial distribution of species assemblages changes generally from early to later successional stages, replicating the later successional patterns during initial establishment may also enhance recovery. Plants established in 'correct arrays' may require little or no subsequent management due to efficiencies in moisture retention, nutrient availability and through sequestration of mobile inorganics and organics. The provision of suitable habitat for known seed dispersing fauna would facilitate seed dispersal of the appropriate plant species (Archer and Pyke 1991). Large ex-pit spoil dumps exclude effectively many proximal and distal colonists. Therefore, provision of migration corridors and alteration of landscape boundaries is necessary to make them more diffuse to biota migration and colonization (Sven-Olov 1990).

SUMMARY

Reclamation of high elevation surface mine disturbances is constrained by several factors, the most important of which is the availability of appropriate plant materials during the 'controlled colonization' phase. Therefore, 'managed natural' colonization has been proposed as an alternative. The management model is based upon maximizing satellite colonization of the matrix and on stimulating patch expansion.

Application of the core/satellite colonization model should increase beta and gamma diversity in reclaimed disturbances and stimulate heterotrophic succession.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF SPONSORS	vi
INDUSTRIAL FACILITIES	
Industrial Site Decommissioning in Alberta	1
Walter J. Ceroici	
Changing Knowledge Needs for Wellsite Reclamation	3
Jim Smith	
The Orphan Facilities and Pipeline Program: An Industry/Government Responsibility	7
David Lloyd and David Sandmeyer	
In-Situ Amelioration of Sodic Mine Spoil Using Sulfur, Gypsum and Crop Management ...	11
Jeff J. Sansom, M. Anne Naeth, and David S. Chanasyk	
Bioremediation of Contaminated Sites	13
Christopher Schneider	
Contaminant Metal Concentration in Alberta Soils Under Different Land Uses	17
Gerry Lutwick, Gordon D. Dinwoodie, David Gower and G. E. Nason	
Waste Disposal Guidelines from a Testing Lab's Perspective	19
John Ashworth	
Reclamation of a Former Heavy Oil Plant in Northeastern Alberta	23
Tim R. Bossenberry, J. Jeffrey Wilson, David Evans, Darrell Chollak and George Walker	
Nutrient and Metal Levels and Dynamics on a 30-year Revegetated Copper-Nickel Tailings Site at Copper Cliff, Ontario	27
Jeremy Niemi, John Giffen and Keith Winterhalder	
FORESTS	
Land Application of BCTMP Mill Waste Research in Alberta	31
Terry M. Macyk	
Reclamation to Native Forest Ecosystems in the Oil Sand Region	33
Steve Tuttle	
Land Capability Classification for Forest Ecosystems	37
Leonard A. Leskiw, Steve Tuttle and Earle Anderson	
Forest Land Restoration on Vancouver Island	39
David Polster	

Lichen Diversity in the Reclaimed Areas of Sudbury, Ontario	43
S. Wainio and Peter Beckett	

MOUNTAINS

Application of Population Biology, Conservation Biology and Succession Theory to the Reclamation of a High Elevation Coal Mine	47
Clint R. Smyth	

Plant Community Changes in Response to Anchor Chaining and Seeding on Pinyon/Juniper Sites in Central Utah	51
J. Gregory Sutor	

Tailings Disposal and Reclamation at the Coal Valley Mine	53
Dane McCoy	

In-Pit Disposal Program for Acid Generating Waste Rock	57
Jamie Quesnel and S. W. Stogran	

Reclamation, Trans Canada Highway Twinning, Banff National Park	63
Otto Hammer	

GENERAL ISSUES

Railway Reclamation: Issues and Opportunities	67
Chris B. Powter and David A. Lloyd	

Experiences in Reclaiming Railways Under Alberta's new Reclamation Guidelines	71
Mark Polet	

Pipeline Abandonment: A Discussion Paper	73
Karen Etherington	

Legal Perspectives on Land Reclamation	75
Gilbert Van Nes	

Liability for Reclamation: Enforcement at Common Law	77
Adrian Currie	

WATER AND WETLANDS

Coursier Reservoir: The Planning and Costs Associated with the Reconstruction and Revegetation of a Subalpine Lake	81
J. Leah Jackson	

Spray Lakes Reclamation Project	85
Margwyn R. Zacaruk	

The Pine Coulee Project: Linking Reclamation Planning to Impact Assessment	89
Ron Middleton	

Design and Construction Management Aspects of Constructed Wetlands	93
Bernard Amell and Kim Eastlick	

Natural Revegetation of an Alberta Peatland after Horticultural Peat Extraction	97
Wayne S. Tedder and Larry W. Turchenek	

RUNOFF/EROSION

Computer Modelling of Soil Erosion from Reclaimed Land	101
Les Sawatsky, Wes Dick and Senarath Ekanayake	

Runoff and Sediment Yield under Grazing in Foothills Fescue Grassland of Alberta	103
M. Anne Naeth and David S. Chanasyk	

Runoff Curve Numbers for Two Reclaimed Watersheds in Central Alberta	107
Ted E. Harms and David S. Chanasyk	

Vegetation Characteristics, Grazing Disturbance and Soil Erosion	111
Suzanne I. Gill, M. Anne Naeth, David S. Chanasyk and V. S. Baron	

PRAIRIE

Renewing the Ecological Integrity of Disturbed Native Prairie	113
Heather S. Gerling	

Mixed Grass Prairie habitat Restoration Project: Landscape Restoration in the Moist Mixed Grass Prairie	117
Dean Nerberg	

Native Prairie Regeneration After Pipeline Construction: A Comparison Between Topsoil Stripping versus No Topsoil Stripping During Construction	119
Gordon Dunn and Gina Fryer	

Restoration of Native Sandhills Vegetation after Pipeline Construction in the Great Sand Hills Region of Saskatchewan	123
David G. Walker, Laurier Kremer and Wayne Marshall	

The Effects of Grazing, Mowing, Glyphosate and Burning on Smooth Brome in Fescue Grassland	125
D. J. Brown and M. Anne Naeth	

VEGETATION

Avoiding Downy Brome When Buying Seed	127
Kerby Lowen and Sarah Foster-Stubbs	

Biodiversity and Reclamation: How Many Species do we Need in a Seed Mix?	131
Dana Bush and M. Anne Naeth	
Germination and Survivability of Selected Native and Introduced Grasses and Legumes	133
William E. Pelech and M. Anne Naeth	
Road Maps for Repairing Ecological Damage	135
Andy Hammermeister	
Ecovar Developments in Western Canada	137
Les Wetter and Brent Wark	
Plant Growth on Aggregated Oil Sands Processing Wastes	139
Xiaomei Li, Jim Storey, Paul Y. P. Yeung and Martin Y. P. Fung	
The Clover Bar Landfill: A State of the Art Landfill Reclamation Process	141
Ann Smreciu, Nolan Turner and Don Barron	
BULK DENSITY	
A Method of Characterizing the Bulk Density of Compressible Particulate Material	145
D. Guenther, Stacy Schaub and J. Leonard	
Near-Surface Compaction Under Grazing of Annual and Perennial Forages	149
Dennis Twerdoff, David S. Chanasyk, M. Anne Naeth and V. S. Baron	
Grazing Impacts on Bulk Density and Soil Strength in the Foothills Fescue Grasslands of Alberta, Canada	151
David S. Chanasyk and M. Anne Naeth	
Computer Modelling of Soil Erosion from Reclaimed Land	155
Les Sawatsky, Wes Dick and Senarath Ekanayake	

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