

Managing Reclaimed Coal Mine Land: IMPROVING SOIL HEALTH

Looks can be deceiving

A reclaimed strip mine will blend into the landscape and look virtually the same as undisturbed Iowa land. Don't be fooled. Just underneath the surface, the soil remains extremely fragile and susceptible to erosion. If the land is not properly managed, acid-forming materials may resurface and soils may begin to erode.

Fragile soils

The reclamation process only treats the top 12 inches of soil with lime and organic matter to establish vegetation. Once vegetation is established and growing, nutrients are consumed by the vegetation and recycled by the plants. If you are taking vegetation away you will need to replace those nutrients that are harvested along with the vegetation.

As with any perennial system, it is important to maintain soil fertility to create the most productive environment possible. Soil testing and proper nutrient management will help keep nutrients (nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and/or potassium (K)) in balance. Periodically adding compost or manure to the soil can increase organic matter.

You can also increase soil health by keeping the site seeded to a diverse mix of grasses and legumes. This seeding mix can include native or introduced species. What is most important is to establish a diverse stand of vegetation. In addition, legumes or other flowering plants can be included to benefit pollinators.

Where to get help

For assistance with improving soil health or developing a management plan for your reclaimed area, contact your local USDA Service Center.



Resources

Each county in Iowa has a **USDA Service Center** where the local **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)** and **Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)** offices are housed.

These offices have technical and financial assistance available for land management and conservation practices.

Davis SWCD

402 Karr Ave
Bloomfield
(641) 664-2616

Mahaska SWCD

2503 Todd Street
Oskaloosa
(641) 673-3476

Marion SWCD

1445 Lake Drive
Knoxville
(641) 842-3168

Monroe SWCD

1701 S B Street
Albia
(641) 932-7134

Van Buren SWCD

1016 Franklin Street
Keosauqua
(319) 293-3371

Wapello SWCD

2938 Oak Meadow Dr
Ottumwa
(641) 684-6515

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For more information, contact Pathfinders RC&D (641) 472 - 6177 • info@PathfindersRCD.org