

NEWS RELEASE
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PSC Receives National Award for Abandoned Mine Lands Project

BISMARCK, ND – The North Dakota Public Service Commission’s Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) Program is being recognized by the federal Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement for a project completed near Noonan, N.D. The award is given annually to honor the highest quality projects across the nation to reclaim abandoned coal mines. This is the third award since 2016 that the North Dakota AML Program has received.

“Once again, the ND PSC’s small but innovative team has found a way to accomplish more without increasing costs,” said Commissioner Randy Christmann, who holds the coal mining, reclamation and AML portfolios. “Filling these abandoned tunnels ultimately saves money, and probably lives, by preventing future collapses of roads, buildings, and all kinds of infrastructure.”

North Dakota’s AML Program has been selected to receive an award for the exceptional work done as part of the 2020 Noonan Foamed Sand project, which was conducted at the Harris M. Baukol Wildlife Management Area near Noonan. Because of the increasing demand for cement and flyash, the cost for grout has inflated in recent years. This project was an ideal site for trying something different – a foamed sand alternative was used to fill underground mine voids instead of the traditional grout. Foamed sand is composed of finely graded sand, water and a foaming agent with the consistency of shaving cream. It eliminates the use of cement and flyash and is environmentally friendly. The foam is designed to dissipate under pressure and over time will leave just the sand.

The foamed sand was pumped into 63 cased holes and performed very well. The site will be monitored over the next few years. It is not known at this time if the foamed sand can completely replace the cement grout used, but it has proven to be a less expensive tool that can help stretch dollars available and accomplish more projects to eliminate dangers associated with abandoned mines.

The goal of the AML Program is to eliminate hazards related to coal mining that was conducted prior to the enactment of the 1977 federal reclamation act. The Commission receives a grant to fund the program from the federal Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement. Grant funds come from a federal reclamation fee collected on each ton of mined coal.

The North Dakota Public Service Commission is a constitutionally created state agency with authority to permit, site and regulate certain business activities in the state including electric and gas utilities, telecommunications companies, power plants, electric transmission lines, pipelines, railroads, auctioneers, commercial weighing devices, pipeline safety and coal mine reclamation. For more information, contact the Public Service Commission at (701) 328-2400 or www.psc.nd.gov.

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Contractors Use Foamed Sand to Fill Underground Mine Voids