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New Mexico's Mining and Minerals Division earns national award for reclaiming abandoned coal mine site

Project addressed hazards that threatened to destroy road and pollute adjacent stream

SANTA FE – A project restoring vegetation on a Northern New Mexico site that had been covered by waste piles from an abandoned coal mine for nearly a century earned the New Mexico Mining and Minerals Division the 2024 Small Project of the Year Award from the federal Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE).

The Tin Pan Canyon Gob Reclamation project, located near Raton, was managed by the Mining and Minerals Division's (MMD) Abandoned Mine Land Program (AML) staff. MMD is part of the New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD).

The award-winning project stemmed run-off from two coal waste piles that was eroding a nearby road and threatening to pollute an adjacent stream. The New Mexico AML program staff accepted the award, officially known as the Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Award, at the OSMRE's National Association of AML Programs conference in Canaan Valley, West Virginia, on Sept. 23.

"The Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Awards honor the best examples of AML reclamation in our nation," said OSMRE Principal Deputy Director **Sharon Buccino**. "Our state and Tribal partners work hard to remove health hazards and reclaim former coal communities. These awards showcase what is possible for reinvigorating former coal communities."

"This project is an example of the outstanding work our AML program staff consistently does to return former mining sites to productive use. This is a well-deserved honor," said EMNRD Sec. Designate **Melanie Kenderdine**.

Santa Fe-based San Isidro Permaculture, an environmentally focused design and construction firm, was contracted by the New Mexico AML program to implement the solution for the Tin Pan Canyon issues. The project team slowed the runoff from the waste piles by installing terraces made of straw bales and then planting seedlings directly behind them, hoping to eventually blend in with surrounding hillsides. The team also constructed a rock chute in a drainage channel to stabilize the road.

The New Mexico Forestry Division, also a part of EMNRD, provided the 5,000-plus seedlings that were planted behind lines of straw bales. These rooting zones were augmented with compost, wood chips, gypsum and organic fertilizer. The straw bales slow the water flow down the waste piles and the augmentations improve the rooting conditions.

This configuration is expected to improve water quality, enhance landscaping, and create safe recreational opportunities for the surrounding community.

"Most of the work on this project occurred during peak COVID restrictions in 2020 and 2021, which made for challenging conditions," said **Mike Tompson**, New Mexico's AML Program Manager. "San Isidro Permaculture did a lot of hard, manual labor, with half of it done in winter. Local property owners are pleased that the drainage channel no longer threatens the road, and the adjacent stream is seeing less sediment. In our view, the project was a complete success."

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New Mexico Abandoned Mine Land Program staff accepting the Small Project Award from OSMRE Principal Deputy Director Sharon Buccino (Left to right: Lloyd Moiola, Matt Peralta, Sharon Buccino, Mike Thompson)



Coal waste piles, otherwise known as "gob" piles, in their abandoned state before the project took place



Contractor adding compost and wood chips before straw bale terraces.



Vegetation growing two years after the project was completed.