Quinn Administration Announces $24 Million in Federal Mine Reclamation Grants

Funds to Clean Up and Improve Safety of Abandoned Mines

CHICAGO – December 15, 2011. Governor Pat Quinn’s administration today announced a $24 million in grant from the U.S. Department of the Interior to help reclaim land previously used for mining. The funding was awarded to the state’s Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) program which is administered by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Office of Mines and Minerals.

“Mining provides valuable resources and economic activity, but it is crucial that areas used for mining are made safe for the public once mining operations end,” said Governor Quinn. “This funding will allow us to continue to clean up and improve safety at long-abandoned mining sites, while creating jobs for Illinois workers.”

The Abandoned Mined Lands and Water Reclamation Act requires mining companies to restore the land back to its original state once operations cease. Mines abandoned before 1977 do not fall under the current regulations, so the federal Abandoned Mine Lands Program was created to reclaim those deserted mining areas. Former mines that have been abandoned pose safety risks due to mine shaft openings, mine subsidence, dilapidated structures and dangerous embankments left by the mining operation.

“Today’s funding is an investment in Illinois’ environmental and economic future,” said U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL). “Not only will it create a healthy, safer environment for the next generation, this funding has the potential to create hundreds of jobs in our state right away.”
Illinois has received $67 million from the federal Abandoned Mine Lands Program over the past five years. The reclamation work done through the AML program employs approximately 200 construction workers throughout Illinois.
“This program helps us eliminate public health and safety hazards, and environmental degradation from abandoned coal mine operations. I am pleased the federal government has increased its level of funding so we can continue this important work,” said Illinois Department of Natural Resources Director Marc Miller.

Last year, Illinois’ AML program received $17.1 million in federal funds and reclaimed 14 abandoned mine sites over more than 115 acres. That included more than two dozen critical projects throughout the state, addressing sudden public safety concerns, such as structures affected by mine subsidence, open mine shafts or pits, methane gas leaks and mine refuse fires.

Since the inception of the state’s AML program in 1982, Illinois has received over $287 million in federal funding that helped reclaim over 10,000 acres at nearly 700 abandoned mine sites. Project include sealing over 1,500 mine openings, demolishing over 1,000 hazardous structures, and reclaiming 6,000 acres of coal processing waste.