

A Short History of the American Society for Mining and Reclamation¹

By Bill Plass, Jeff Skousen and Dick Barnhisel,

Introduction

The American Society for Mining and Reclamation (ASMR) is a professional Society composed of about 400 people. Members include representatives of mining companies, corporate offices, and consulting services (40%); employees of academic and research institutions (25%); employees of federal and state regulatory agencies (30%); and students (5%). A majority of the members are directly involved in activities associated with coal mining and the reclamation of disturbed areas. Membership is increasing for those concerned with the extraction of other minerals.

The objectives of the society are:

- A. To encourage communication among research scientists, the mining industry, regulatory agencies, and landowners with respect to mining and reclamation research and practices.
- B. To promote and support research relating to land reclamation.
- C. To provide technical expertise to those agencies, organizations, or others who seek assistance in the development and execution of research, demonstration projects, or reclamation plans.
- D. To promote and support educational programs relating to reclamation of lands disturbed by mineral extraction.

Original Organization

The Society developed from smaller organizations, which were initially established in West Virginia. Several foresighted individuals in the late 1960's recognized the importance that research could play in the development of mining and reclamation practices and policies, and in the mitigation of environmental impacts from mining.

In 1968, a tripartite agreement was reached among the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources, Division of Reclamation (Ben Greene, chief), the West Virginia Surface Mining and Reclamation Association (Dick Vande Linde, executive director), and the U.S. Forest Service (Bill Plass, reclamation researcher). These three parties agreed to form an advisory board to discuss reclamation research. The Forest Service established an office in Princeton, West Virginia and assigned Bill Plass to devote his position to mine land reclamation research. The three organizations requested assistance from the Soil Conservation Service (represented by Frank Glover) and West Virginia University (represented by Richard M. Smith). These five individuals composed the "Steering Committee for Surface Mine Research in West Virginia."

Organizational Growth

The semi-annual meetings of the Steering Committee were publicized and soon became a popular forum for discussion of reclamation research. After two years, the number of participants increased, and representatives from surrounding states attended the meetings. It became apparent that such meetings were needed to disseminate research results, discuss mutual problems, and coordinate research programs. Since the concept proved successful in West Virginia, the Committee determined that a regional organization with similar objectives could succeed.

Individuals interested in forming a regional organization were invited to attend a meeting in Charleston, West Virginia on May 16, 1973. Ben Greene, chief of WV-DNR's Reclamation Division, invited representatives from WVSMRA (Ben Lusk, president), WVU, USDA SCS, USDA Forest Service, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Ohio Reclamation Association, and the Interstate Mining Compact Commission. A decision was made to form the "Council for Surface Mining and Reclamation in Appalachia." The basic objectives were the same: 1) to discuss current research; 2) to identify research priorities; and 3) to create opportunities for dissemination of reclamation technology. The Council continued to meet semi-annually within the Appalachian region and interest in the meetings continued and participation expanded.

¹ A more complete history is available on ASMR's web page <http://ces.ca.uky.edu/asmr> This includes an Expanded History written by Tom Zarger



Figure 1. Reclamation Pioneers. These three gentlemen, Bill Plass (USDA Forest Service), Dick Vande Linde (WV Mining and Reclamation Association), and Ben Greene (WV Division of Natural Resources), were responsible for establishing the roots of the organization that would become the American Society of Mining and Reclamation (ASMR).

Expansion Again

During this initial phase of the organizations, there were two meetings per year. In November 1978, at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, the decision was made to extend the geographical base of the organization to the 100th meridian. The name was changed to the "American Council for Reclamation Research." Semi-annual meetings were held at locations in the Midwest and Appalachian regions. This group continued to meet twice a year for the next four years. Western reclamationists became interested, and their involvement in Council activities increased during subsequent years.

National Organization

Support and interest in this reclamation council was now national, and in 1982, the Council once again changed its name to reflect the widening scope of its activities. The "American Society for Surface Mining & Reclamation" (ASSMR) was established with Eastern and Western Divisions within the Society. The name was changed again in 2001 to its current one "American Society of Mining and Reclamation" ASMR. The structure of the Society has changed some in the past few years with the adoption of new by-laws in 2002 with a modification of its governing board known as the National Executive Council or the NEC.

Bill Plass served as the Executive Secretary over much of the history of the organization. In 1999, Richard Barnhisel became the Executive Secretary and the office of the Society moved from Princeton WV to Lexington KY.

The first annual meeting of ASSMR was held in July 1984 at Owensboro, Kentucky. Annual meetings of the Society have been held since then by alternating between eastern and western locations.

Denver, CO	1985	Gillette, WY	1995
Jackson, MS	1986	Knoxville, TN	1996
Billings, MT	1987	Austin, TX	1997
Pittsburgh, PA	1988	St. Louis, MO	1998
Calgary, AB, Canada	1989	Scottsdale, AZ	1999
Charleston, WV	1990	Tampa, FL	2000
Durango, CO	1991	Albuquerque, NM	2001
Duluth, MN	1992	Lexington, KY	2002
Spokane, WA	1993	Billings, MT	2003
Pittsburgh, PA	1994	Morgantown, WV	2004

2004 Annual Meeting

The 2004 national meeting of ASMR will be held in Morgantown, West Virginia on April 18-22, 2004. After many years of consistent growth, the Society is returning again to the state in which the basic concepts for the organization originated. It is anticipated that more than 500 people will attend the conference, representing the mining industry, academic and research institutions, regulatory agencies, and watershed organizations. Participants will come from many coal mining states, and from countries such as Canada, Mexico, England, Germany, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and China.

Along with research results and application of reclamation technologies in the field, an exhibit of reclamation products and services will be held in conjunction with the meeting. Workshops and field trips are also planned as part of the meeting.

Authors

Bill Plass, retired from the USDA, Forest Service, has served as the executive secretary of ASMR from its inception until 2000. He has authored numerous reclamation articles and has devoted his life to conducting reclamation research and getting reclamation information to those who can apply it. He continues to be active in the society and is serving as secretary of the International Affiliation of Land Reclamation. He continues to live in Princeton with his wife, Lola.

Jeff Skousen is a professor of soil science at West Virginia University, and is a reclamation specialist. He is the president of ASMR in 2004, and the chairman of the 2004 ASMR annual meeting being held in Morgantown.

Dick Barnhisel is a professor of agronomy and geology at the University of Kentucky and currently serves the Society as its Executive Secretary. He has published over 50 articles on reclamation and has over 35 students completing degrees associated with reclamation. For the past 15 years he has specialized reclamation of prime land disturbed by coal mining.