



Dedicated to Mine Land Reclamation, Conservation, & Economic Development in the Wyoming Valley

**Testimony of Terence J. Ostrowski, PE  
President and CEO of Earth Conservancy  
before the Senate Committee on Community, Economic, & Recreational Development**

**Public Hearing on the Environmental and Economic Impacts  
of the Anthracite Industry in Northeastern Pennsylvania  
and Pennsylvania's Coal Refuse Energy and Reclamation Tax Credit**

**Tuesday, September 27, 2022 - 1:30 p.m.**

Good morning, Chairman Yudichak, Minority Chairwoman Cappelletti, and members of the Senate Community, Economic, & Recreational Development Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Terry Ostrowski and I am President/CEO of Earth Conservancy.

Earth Conservancy is a nonprofit organization operating in northeastern Pennsylvania, working primarily with a group of communities surrounding Nanticoke, which collectively is known as the Lower South Valley. We were founded in 1992 by a coalition of government, education, business, and community leaders. The group, after raising \$16 million in grants and private contributions, purchased over 16,000 acres of land from a bankrupt anthracite coal company. At the time, the company had been trying to sell its properties off piecemeal to generate income. However, many were concerned about how the lands would be used. Earth Conservancy's belief was that, in working with local communities, a better plan could be formulated, using the land for the region's benefit.

In order to do this, Earth Conservancy carries out several key activities. We develop sustainable land use plans; reclaim abandoned minelands; work to restore watersheds damaged by past mining activities; and seek to preserve 10,000 of our 16,000 acres for recreation and greenspace. This is all done in extensive collaboration with our local communities. As of today, we have reclaimed more than 2,000 acres of damaged land that are now already in or available for constructive use across industrial, commercial, residential, and recreational sectors. We have

also undertaken many projects to mitigate abandoned mine drainage in area watersheds. Our work has earned us numerous federal, state, and local awards, including eight Pennsylvania Governor's Awards for Environmental Excellence. Over \$56.3 million has been invested in our work to date. All of these projects trace back to Earth Conservancy's overarching plan, one that, in the wake of anthracite's decline, seeks a more livable community now, and clears the way for positive, progressive change for future generations.

Removal of refuse coal from the landscape is a critical step in the reclamation process. Across our properties have sat massive waste piles, made up of thousands – sometimes millions – of tons of cast-off silt, coal, and shale that historically were unable to be used for fuel. These banks, towering above trees and homes, are barren, acres-wide, and stories-high. Often, they are compared to a moonscape. Yet, they are more than an eyesore. They are unstable, prone to slumping, erosion, complete slope failure, and even fire, which makes them a public safety concern. They also impair the environment by reducing wildlife habitat and discharging pollutive mine drainage into local waterways.

The cogeneration industry, supported through the Coal Refuse Energy and Reclamation Tax Credit, helps turn these damaged tracts into places of potential. Unquestionably, Earth Conservancy would not have accomplished so much without their vital service. Reclamation of mine-scarred lands is expensive, costing nearly \$18,000 per acre. Including removal of waste coal into our project budgets would make reclamation unfeasible. Earth Conservancy, as a nonprofit, relies on grants for support. The work of the cogeneration plants not only readies a site for reclamation; it also allows us to leverage that investment to raise additional funds. Without this cooperative partnership, the burden of reclamation would fall to the State.

At present, seven of Earth Conservancy's major projects have used resource recovery prior to reclamation. They range in size and scope, and now are being reused in a variety of ways. For example:

- Approximately 150,000 tons of waste coal was recovered from our 15-acre Franklin Bank site, which was adjacent to an existing residential neighborhood. Today, construction of 46 townhomes is underway.

- Another project, the Preston and Sugar Notch Banks, had 2,000,000 tons of culm removed. Part of the site is now used for several distribution centers; the other part has become a recreational complex for youth sports.
- We also had the 180-acre Huber Bank, which, as the first sight greeting visitors entering the Wyoming Valley through the I-81 corridor, was an enormous impediment to development in the region. Cogeneration recovered 800,000 tons of material. Residual ash from the cogeneration process was then used during reclamation.

Huber Bank, which now houses distribution facilities for Chewy, Adidas, and Patagonia, instigated a wave of revitalization in the region. One developer alone has invested over \$1 billion in its redevelopment activity, constructing more than 7.5 million square feet of industrial space, and creating over 6,700 direct and indirect jobs. Many of these properties had coal recovery performed. If it were not for that initial activity, those sites would likely have remained unreclaimed. Development, consequently, would be unlikely. A full summary of acreage and recovery totals for Earth Conservancy properties, as well as before and after images, is included as an attachment to my testimony.

In total, over 20 million tons of coal refuse has been processed from Earth Conservancy sites. At a 40% recovery rate, that means 8 million tons were burned to generate electricity. It also means that over 570 acres of mine-scarred land has been readied for reclamation. The cogeneration industry was crucial to Earth Conservancy reaching this milestone. We see the industry's work as in keeping with our own mission, helping to address the damages from historic mining in ways that benefit both the environment and the community. The cogeneration industry has contributed greatly to Earth Conservancy's success in reclaiming thousands of acres of mine-scarred land in Luzerne County. Their work makes environmental and economic sense, helping to return idle and damaged lands to productivity, while allowing pristine greenspace to remain untouched.



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## Attachment A

### Waste Coal Material Processed on Earth Conservancy Projects from 1995 to 2022

#### Past Projects

Project	Acreage	Tons Processed
Reynolds Bank	20	800,000
Franklin Bank	15	150,000
Preston & Sugar Notch Banks	100	2,000,000
Huber Bank	80	800,000
Bliss Bank	100	700,000
Truesdale Bank	180	900,000
Loomis Bank	75	2,703,000
<b>Totals</b>	<b>570 acres</b>	<b>8,053,000 tons</b>

In total, 8,053,000 tons of waste coal material have been recovered for electricity usage, and have improved 570 acres of legacy mine lands. At a 40% recovery rate, this means 20 million tons of culm have been processed overall.

#### Future Work

Currently, Earth Conservancy is managing the West End project, located within what is now the Pinchot State Forest near Mocanaqua. We anticipate this project will process another 3,500,000 tons of waste coal from 300 acres of abandoned mine lands, which will complete the processing of useable land from Earth Conservancy properties.

Project	Acreage	Tons to be Processed
West End Bank	20	3,500,000
<b>Projected Totals of All Projects</b>	<b>590 acres</b>	<b>11,553,000 tons</b>

# Franklin Bank

150,000 tons processed | 15 acres reclaimed



# Preston & Sugar Notch Banks

2,000,000 tons processed | 100 acres reclaimed



# Huber Bank

800,000 tons processed | 80 acres reclaimed



# Bliss Bank

700,000 tons processed | 100 acres reclaimed



# Truesdale Bank

900,000 tons processed | 180 acres reclaimed



# Loomis Bank

2,703,000 tons processed | 75 acres reclaimed



# West End Bank

3,500,000 tons to be processed | 590 acres to be reclaimed

