

THE KENTUCKY REFORESTATION INITIATIVE¹

Paul F. Rothman²

Abstract. In an effort to aggressively promote and encourage “Forest Land” as the “Post Mining Land Use” of choice on Kentucky coal mines, the Department for Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (DSMRE) began the Kentucky Reforestation Initiative in the fall of 1995. The Reforestation Initiative is a collaborative effort between the DSMRE, University of Kentucky (UK), federal Office of Surface Mining (OSM), environmental groups, the coal industry and other interested parties, assembled for the purpose of developing reclamation guidelines that would provide for the establishment of healthy productive forests on coal mined lands. Suggestions from members of these groups were incorporated into Reclamation Advisory Memorandum (RAM) #124, which was issued on March 10, 1997. This document provides guidance on the selection of growth medium, grading techniques, selection of tree compatible ground covers, soil amelioration, tree selection, and planting recommendations. Interestingly, it was field inspection personnel who initially exhibited the greatest aversion to the new reclamation techniques. This was largely due to the ingrained belief that a site was not stable if it wasn’t repeatedly graded, or was not properly reclaimed unless it had a pasture-like appearance. As a consequence, the mining industry was hesitant to embrace this guidance – even if it resulted in reduced reclamation costs and increased tree survival and growth. Ongoing reforestation research by the University of Kentucky utilizing, in part, the reclamation techniques outlined in RAM #124 is demonstrating that high-value hardwood forest can be successfully established on strip-mined land. The emphasis of this research has been on the establishment and growth of desirable hardwood and pine species (white oak, red oak, white ash, black walnut, yellow poplar, royal paulownia and eastern white pine). The ongoing field research has been very successful and thoroughly supports the reclamation techniques contained in RAM #124. Since issuance of RAM #124 there has been a growing interest in reforestation. There has been an increase in the number of permit applications that propose a post-mining land use that requires the establishment of trees and shrubs.

Key words: Tree planting, mined land, reclamation

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² Paul F. Rothman is Environmental Scientist, Kentucky Department of Natural Resources, Frankfort, Kentucky.