



**NASLR**  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
STATE LAND RECLAMATIONISTS

Summer 2021

<http://www.naslr.org>



"DEDICATED TO QUALITY LAND RECLAMATION"

<b>Message from the President</b>	<b>Page 2</b>
<b>2021 NASLR Conference Update</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>Schedule, Registration</b>	
<b>NASLR on social media</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>Environmental Stewardship</b>	<b>Page 5</b>
<b>Notes from the Field</b>	<b>Page 7</b>
<b>Officers and Committee Members</b>	<b>Page 9</b>

## ***Message from the President***

***By Mike Haney***

***Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection***

Greetings everyone!

I'm excited to report that the NASLR organization has been busy preparing for the 2021 online annual conference and has some wonderful people involved who are making sure our organization remains a meaningful resource and platform for promoting reclamation of mined lands. We're seriously looking forward to your participation and all the interaction and benefits that can be a part of NASLR membership. Let me take a moment and describe the subject of what inspires and motivates us, so that you might be able to gain an understanding of the things we share that transcend any technical or organizational differences there may be between your familiar operational spheres and experiences and this organization we have here.

My tenure at NASLR has really been a valuable experience for me to channel my enthusiasm and efforts for environmental stewardship, which I define along the lines of making sure that environments, settings, biological systems and resources are dealt with in responsible ways so that it can be said that those involved restored things in near original (pre-mining) or even better post-mining shape after the reclamation activities occurred. I find reclamation to be a discipline of true understanding, of restoration, remediating, nurturing, and improvement. Where we focus on what has been in some way shape or form thrown out of equilibrium and learn as we go to cooperatively help restore that balance. And to me, that is not only an exciting prospect full of hopeful thinking, but a privilege to enter a group of like-minded, dedicated, and extremely talented people who take pride and joy in doing whatever is needed to reform the parts of this country that have



experienced declining environmental value into places that are safe, self-supporting, and usable. A discipline that makes colleagues, allies, and friends as commonly as it does recommendations for successful reclamation. It's an extremely constructive line of work, when you think about it, because restoration of the physical and chemical setting of a place is like setting the stage for beautiful things to occur, or making sure the foundation of future structures can be built on reliable, stable ground that will indeed support the kind of activities that will be helpful to whatever sort of life activities need to be supported. In a chemistry-minded way, I think of it as being able to help restore the potential energy of systems where kinetic energy is needed for essential activities to occur, and that is a professionally satisfying aspect for me. And perhaps my favorite thing about NASLR is how forward-thinking the people involved with this organization are, in that regardless of how any given setting has been changed through mining, the amazing focus of so many is that the past is unchangeable and though understanding how what happened is valuable, the true treasure is the capability to help contribute in reclaiming mined lands back to a state of usability and inherent natural value that has for so long been the heritage of this American continent. Our country thrives when it can draw together and move constructive things forward through encouragement, cooperation, and resourcefulness, and that's what NASLR does, too. I hope that you can find a place among such wonderfully motivated and truly successful people in our organization and invite you to be a welcome part of it!

**49TH  
ANNUAL**



**SEPTEMBER  
28-29**

## **NASLR Conference and Technical Sessions REGISTRATION**

An *exciting* information packed conference is planned.

More information on conference speakers and continuing education opportunities will be forth coming. Be sure to check the [NASLR website](http://www.naslr.org) for up-to-date information. <http://www.naslr.org>

Click on the **hyperlink** below for **EACH** session/meeting you wish to attend, and use the specific registration password for that session. We recommend using Internet Explorer as your browser when registering.

Please contact Simone Rodriquez ([simone.rodriquez@dec.ny.gov](mailto:simone.rodriquez@dec.ny.gov)) if you need assistance with registration.

**Technical Session 1 - Tues, Sept 28, 10:00 AM**

**Event number: 161 380 6859**

**Registration Password: TechSession1**

**[Register](#)**

**Technical Session 2 - Tues, Sept 28, 3:00 PM**

**Event number: 161 151 9994**

**Registration Password: TechSession2**

**[Register](#)**

**Technical Session 3 - Wed, Sept 29, 10:00 AM**

**Event number: 161 188 6532**

**Registration Password: TechSession3**

**[Register](#)**

**Business Meeting— Wed, Sept 29, 3:00 PM**

**Event number: 161 899 9447**

**Registration Password: 2021Meeting**

**[Register](#)**



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# ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

## *A Personal Testimony from Mike Haney*

I've found that land reclamation is extremely important to me, and I think it's because I was raised in a setting where the natural habitats, resources, and environments were in excellent condition, and though not fully aware at the time, I was patiently taught to truly treasure the environment through what I came to know as stewardship. I was born in Warren County, and raised in the very small community of Tidioute in northwestern Pennsylvania, where my front yard contained the confluence of two small trout-filled streams that less than a half mile away spilled into the serene and powerful Allegheny River on the western flank of the gorgeous deep woods of the Allegheny National Forest. Just a short 15 miles away is the location of Colonel Edwin Drake's famous 69-foot deep crude oil well that in 1859 started the immense oil boom that literally fueled the history-changing Industrial Revolution.



*Ebensburg Power Co.'s*

*"Spangler GFCC Reclamation Contract" Before Reclamation*

My dad spent his career in the oil and gas industry in western Pennsylvania, and my mom's side of the family's heritage is in the lumber industry; logging, milling, kiln-drying, and managing the wonderfully diverse timber found throughout the region. Growing up, I was enthralled in outdoor recreation, and was always fascinated by pictures of this area during the late 1800's and early 1900's as a treeless landscape, where almost every available standing tree was felled for construction of boom-town housing and oil derricks, steam locomotive firewood, and oil-toting barges that often wrecked along flooded streams, spilling crude oil over top the tributaries used to convey huge volumes to market. I was amazed at the stories of my grandfather and dad who told of subsequent over-the-ground rudimentary crude oil pipelines and collection vats that often burst, coating the ground and nearby streams with black sheen. I clearly remember the myriad fiery flares of excess natural gas that dotted the refineries in Warren and Oil City, PA, lighting the night as torches that testified of the vast subterranean resources contained within the massive pipes and conduits of the landscape. The visual contrast of inherent industrial infrastructure and sweeping natural beauty has come to impress me as a scene of great resource development and even greater, dramatic re-equilibration to natural beauty. And I now realize much of what I came to cherish as my childhood paradise was the result of great collective American environmental stewardship, where lands were re-planted with abundantly diverse trees and selective cutting of forestland yielded more sustainable timber, and where responsible petroleum resource development not only developed a vast store of oil and gas, but also served and supported thousands of families (like mine) and peripheral industries (like plastics) while conveying these materials in ways that harmonize with the natural landscapes and controlling features of the area, and where natural beauty is preserved for tremendously beneficial recreational activities for countless thousands of people. This life lesson has instilled in me a hopeful optimism that continues to serve me well as my wife and I strive to raise up our own family in the heart of the bituminous coalfields of western Pennsylvania, where similarly astounding historical natural resource development has resulted in some severe environmental impacts. A quick online search of the word stewardship can yield some good results, including Merriam-Webster's

description of stewardship as “*careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one’s care.*”, or Dictionary.com, where it is summarized as “*the responsible overseeing and protection of something considered worth caring for and preserving.*”. These quotes do well to concisely describe some key aspects of the basic generic concept, but I encourage the reader also consider that environmental stewardship includes patient, artful dedication and emotional commitment to outlast and outwork the challenges that oftentimes beset the cause of land reclamation. One of the biggest antagonists to environmental stewardship is cost, because we so often desire a return on investment that we ourselves can realize and enjoy. In retrospect, I am tremendously grateful to the preceding generations of environmental stewards that collectively invested funds and resources to restore the forests, tributaries, and habitats of northwestern Pennsylvania where I grew up among their children and grandchildren. That stewardship lesson is one I’m happy to have learned and am willing to pay forward in my efforts to help mined land reclamation.

Another factor that antagonizes land reclamation efforts is a lack of optimism, or a sense of hopelessness at a lost cause, or a scene too far gone to be restored. But this tremendously realistic-looking obstacle is all too often imaginary. Let me testify with a personal story about why I can say this.

For a 7-year interval in the 1960’s my mother’s family moved to northern Cambria County, (where I now live), so that my grandfather could help run a lumber mill in Spangler, PA. I often heard stories about how the air smelled of sulfur, the streams and rivers ran orange with iron, and the reject material (“boney shale”) from mines was piled in mountainous volumes by the side of roads and streams where it would putrefy, smolder, sometimes catch fire, and always bleed iron water, turning the surrounding area desolate. I never imagined that I would come to voluntarily live in this place, which my mind’s eye depicted as the opposite of my cherished pristine hometown settings. I clearly recall a sense of disappointing, resigning loss when my wife and I ended up moving to this same area in 2007 and I found it to be much like my feared recollection of dead streams, orange rivers, and gigantic sporadic ulcers of smoldering coal refuse. It seemed too much to imagine that these scenes could change. The scale of reclamation was too large, too expensive, too counter-cultural, to be realistic about. I felt as though I’d just have to settle in and tolerate the damage until I could move away to a better place someday. But – through the collective and patient effort of hundreds of people (if not more) and investment of heroic funding and resource allocation, I can happily tell you that the West Branch of the Susquehanna River



*Ebensburg Power Co’s “Spangler GFCC” Site After Reclamation*

youth soccer league, which features a beautiful 14-acre soccer field complex on the grounds of what was once one of the most wretched coal refuse piles in the area. Continued on Pg 7

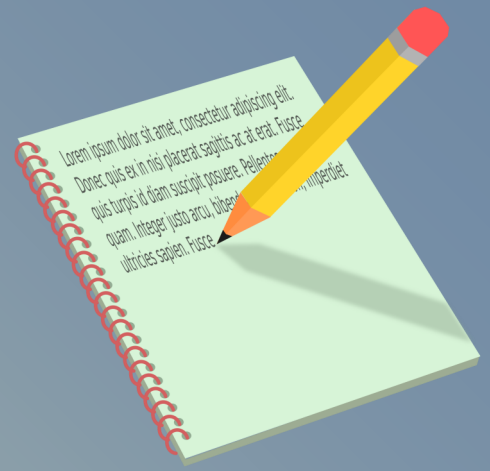
(just yards from my house) has been re-classified by the PA Fish & Boat Commission as a Class-A Trout stream, supporting hold-over populations of trout and exhibiting some beautiful scenery to canoeing and kayaking tourists. My family is deeply involved in the local



# NOTES FROM THE FIELD

## Finding Your Niche In Your Reclamation Career

*By Dean Spindler*



Many of us in reclamation understand the concept of biological niches and the role that each individual species plays in the functioning ecosystem. Many roles exist in the reclamation profession: inspectors, engineers, geologists, hydrologists, soil scientists, wildlife biologists, archeologists, clerical, GIS and computer specialists, fiscal officers, educators, trainers, and various levels of administrators. Each role is a critical niche to the effectiveness of your agency which is our professional “ecosystem”.

At my retirement party I mentioned the old Chinese proverb that “if you choose a job you love, you will never have to work a day in your life”. It took me until about midway into my career to realize this. Early in our reclamation careers, many of us, including myself, set a goal to move up the administrative ladder or to move into technical positions within the organization as time progressed. We figured this was just the logical, forward progression of things. I have done some recent, although 40 years late in my case, reading up on this topic. Each of those readings basically came up with the same questions to ask yourself: a) What are you good at?, b) What are you passionate about?, c) What are your weaknesses?, d) For those things listed as your weaknesses, are you willing to work to improve?, and e) Are your values compatible with your agency responsibilities?

I was passed by for the role of Division Supervisor a few times earlier in my career. These events made me stop and rethink if that was the role I really wanted, and if I got it, would I be good at it? It seems that the bulk of Division Supervisor’s role (“niche” in our functioning professional ecosystem) is managing budgets, dealing with high level agency administrators, and juggling personnel issues...none of which I would consider my strong points. During a two-month stint near the end of my career as the Acting Division Supervisor to fill in between official appointments, I was not in my “happy place” and realized how glad I was that I had not chosen that role as my ultimate niche in our division. One of the familiar army slogans is “Be all you can be”. In my case, a general I am not. I knew I could accomplish the most by tackling issues that needed to be fixed, filling in for positions that had vacancies, or training new recruits. Maybe a lot like Paul Popovich, if you are a lifelong Cubs fan like I am (you should be!) you will be familiar with him. He played in the late 60s and early 70s, could bat right or left handed, and subbed in almost every position. He was the true “renaissance man” baseball player, and right up there in my book with Ernie Banks, the team star. Those two were my baseball heroes as a kid.

More recently when training new recruits as inspectors and extolling the merits of the job while in the field, I did have to remember to tell them...”although being an inspector is a great job, ask yourself if this role will satisfy you until the end of your career”. If the answer to that was yes, then they would end up being a great inspector and a valuable team member, filling their niche. If not, then they needed to make the most of the inspector experience to help them learn the program and ultimately reach their desired

## NOTES FROM THE FIELD cont.



goal, hopefully a role still in reclamation. The inspector experience is the best education you can get in our career. Some of those inspectors have gone on to be state and federal division supervisors, technical specialists, technical program supervisors, even replaced me after retirement, and have all done well. I do remember one OSM field office director who I used to work with when we were both state inspectors, always wanted to get some field time whenever we got together. Back to his roots, so to speak. I think he really missed those inspector days.

In another case, we were looking to expand a specialized team. Two of the talented inspectors came to mind, as “those who can do” are always looked at to do more. At first, I was disappointed that one declined because he wanted to stay with the inspection job that he liked very much. But after rethinking, I realized this was his niche in reclamation. Hopefully all of you have achieved, or on your way to achieving, your niche and having a career that is rewarding and does not feel like “work”.



## ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP Cont.

And we often enjoy biking along one of the many reclaimed railway lines that have been converted into a network of regional scenic recreational trails. For several years now I have had the privilege of working alongside mining companies, watershed organizations, and state and federal agencies to cooperatively bring about a new reality to these settings. I was overjoyed just the other day as I checked up on the progress of a recent reclamation project of nearly 40 acres of what just a year ago was a tepid 90-year old coal refuse pile directly adjacent to the West Branch of the Susquehanna River, to find the pile (sometimes over 20 feet thick), gone (to generate electrical power via local specialized co-generation facilities) and replaced by green grasses thriving over the original topography of the site. And these examples are all within my hometown area, to say nothing of the volumes of other examples being experienced in Pennsylvania! Despite my defeatist attitude of 14 years ago, my kids may come to barely remember those kind of scenes as they grow up, cherishing instead the balanced settings of the things they love to do best. It's a regional success story made up of a composite of local projects and vast efforts that we ought to be truly proud of.

In his 2011 book *Zugunruhe: The Inner Migration to Profound Environmental Change*, author Jason McLennan includes many statements that can be used to describe how such vast environmental changes are made. Among my favorite are such pieces of advice as these: “Strive for each action to reinforce the kind of impact you wish to have.”, and “It is your life. You are not trapped in your reality.”. Let me then take this moment to encourage you no matter what your level of stewardship - to make it personal and overcome the doubts and challenges that arise as we all continue to work in the ever hopeful, always meaningful, and incredibly rewarding discipline of land reclamation. Our reality is what we can make it.



If you are not already a member or know someone interested in becoming involved with a group of reclamation professionals promoting excellence in reclamation please contact us or forward this newsletter to them. You are cordially invited to join NASLR, a group of member state reclamation agencies throughout the United States, as well as government reclamation professionals and industry associates that seek to develop resources and strive to restore mined lands to productive uses.

The four categories of membership are *State, Individual, Associate and Corporate Sponsor*.

To join, see conference information or request additional information, please visit our website at:

[www.naslr.org](http://www.naslr.org)

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## **NASLR NEWSLETTER**

### **Summer 2021**

To submit material for future newsletters please contact Jeff Meitrott [jmeitrott@pa.gov](mailto:jmeitrott@pa.gov).  
Please use a [NASLR Newsletter Submission Form](#) (or [download here](#)).

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