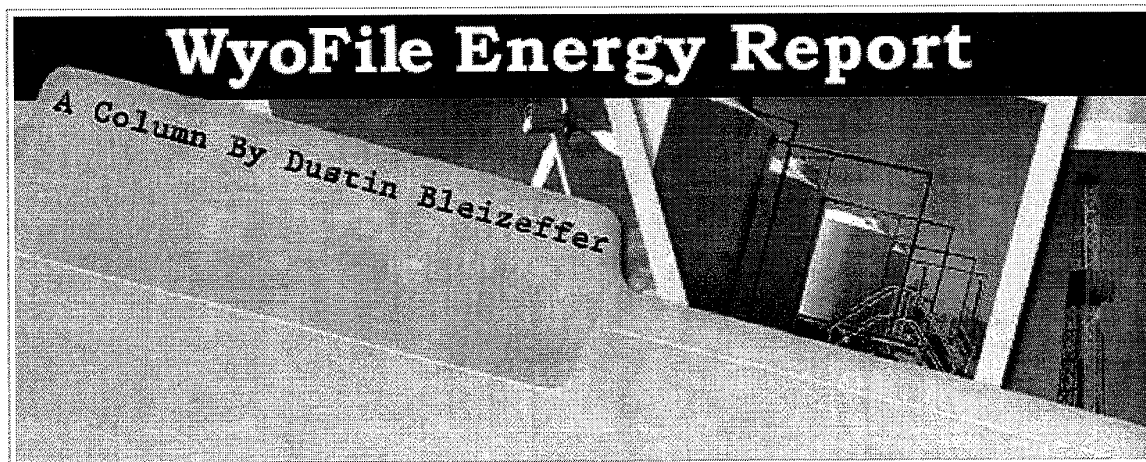


## There's \$428M in unfunded abandoned mine reclamation work in Wyoming

by [Dustin Bleizeffer](#) | FEBRUARY 22, 2013

1SHARES 00010x1SHARES



### There's \$428M in unfunded abandoned mine reclamation work in Wyoming

— February 22, 2013

One of the seemingly mild cost-cutting repercussions of the federal spending "sequestration" set to begin March 1 is a 10 percent reduction in Wyoming's share of the Abandoned Mine Land trust fund appropriation this year — a meager drop from \$15 million to \$13.5 million.

<http://www.wyofile.com/blog/theres-428m-in-unfunded-abandone...> 2/3/2017

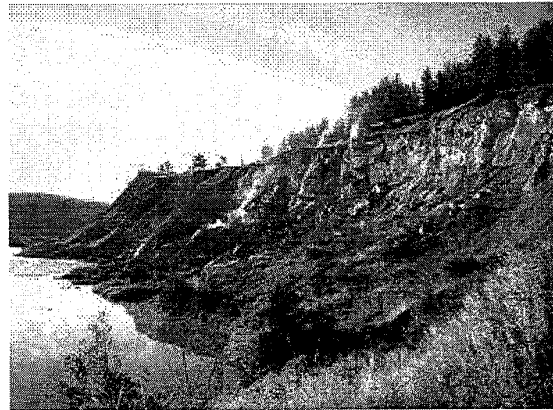
But, there's more to the story.

First, the potential reduction of \$1.5 million annually is salt in a pretty fresh wound for public officials here in Wyoming. Since 2006, Wyoming had been getting an annual disbursement of \$82.7 million, sending state officials on a spending spree of non-reclamation goodies, like a lot of new construction at the University of Wyoming. But it was a midnight "raid" by Congressional Republicans last fall that set a cap at \$15 million for all 28 coal-producing states and tribes — an affront to Wyoming in particular because Wyoming has been, by far, the largest contributor, and therefore largest recipient, of AML funds.



So while Wyoming officials were still stinging from what will amount to a loss of \$700 million over several years, they learned this week that the loss could be made more dramatic thanks to sequestration.

Then there's also the matter of actually reclaiming abandoned mines in Wyoming. There's a general sense that Wyoming long ago cleaned up its most hazardous abandoned mine sites. Yet there are many 200-foot highwalls cut in areas of the Gas Hills where a large number of people go to recreate. There are dozens of open mine shafts still being discovered around the state, and massive voids honeycombed beneath Rock Springs, threatening homes and the city's infrastructure.

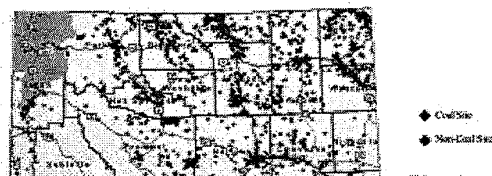


"There's about \$9 million worth of work (yet to be done) in and all around the Rock Springs area," said Alan Edwards, administrator of the AML program in Wyoming.

North of Sheridan there's an abandoned mine location known as Placheck, where a creek is diverted into an open pit filling up with sludge and an underground coal fire still smolders. Edwards said it could cost \$5.5 million or more before the hazards are properly reclaimed.

These are the types of messes that mining companies just walked away from — until 1977. Edwards said that every year, his staff discovers more of these environmental legacies of the mining industry. As it stands today, the Wyoming AML program's list of unfunded reclamation projects adds up to \$428 million, according to Edwards. That's the fiscal need not yet met.

In the short-term, however, the shrinking AML disbursements will hardly be felt. The AML program is working with a backlog of past disbursements, which means there's about \$50 million in actual abandoned mine



reclamation queued up for construction action for the 2013 season. Then if the current AML cuts stay in place, the money and the work begins to decrease, to approximately \$32 million in physical work for the 2014 season, possibly \$25 million for the season after.



From top to bottom are abandoned mine sites on the inventory. Many of these are now reclaimed.

"You really start to see the effect of this sequestration next year and the years following that," said Edwards.

And there are real people and businesses that count on the AML program. The vast majority of construction companies that are awarded Wyoming AML contracts are based in Wyoming. They're the same companies faced with the proposition of dwindling federal contracts for highways, too.

"We take this funding seriously," said Edwards, "and we're going to make sure it's used as cost-effectively as possible."

**For more on related sequestration and AML funding, read this WyoFile post: — Wyoming could lose another \$1.5M in AML, thanks to sequestration, February 2013**

— *Dustin Bleizeffer is WyoFile editor-in-chief. You can reach him at (307) 577-6069 or email [dustin@wyofile.com](mailto:dustin@wyofile.com). Follow Dustin on Twitter at [@DBleizeffer](https://twitter.com/DBleizeffer)*



*If you enjoyed this column and would like to see more quality Wyoming journalism, please consider **supporting WyoFile**: a non-partisan, non-profit news organization dedicated to in-depth reporting on Wyoming's people, places and policy.*

**REPUBLISH THIS COLUMN:** For details on how you can republish this column or other WyoFile content for free, [click here](#).

1SHARES 00010x1SHARES

Did You Like This Story?

donate now



## About the Author

[dustin@wyofile.com](mailto:dustin@wyofile.com)