

Revitalizing the Economy of Coal Communities by Leveraging Local Activities and Investing More Act of 2019 or the RECLAIM Act of 2019

Why the RECLAIM Act is Needed:

Over the last eight years, the coal industry has undergone a rapid transformation that has led to significant job losses. This has hit the Appalachian Region particularly hard because coal traditionally provided significant contributions to the local economies. Now many communities are facing the prospect of no longer having a viable source of income. In addition, it is far too common for many of these communities to still be grappling with the environmental legacy of coal mining that took place prior to the passage of the Surface Mining Reclamation Act (SMCRA) of 1977. These areas, called abandoned mine lands (AML), are scattered across the region, and pose a health and safety threat to the citizens of these communities. This includes mine fires, acid mine drainage polluting streams, dangerous abandoned mine shafts and other openings, flooded mine pools, coal refuse mountains, and exposed high walls as just a few examples of legacy mining practices. Throughout Appalachia, an estimated 5.5 million people live within 1 mile of an abandoned mine land. Unfortunately these abandoned mine-scarred lands are pose not just a health and safety threat, but hinder economic development opportunities in the region.

The existing backlog of AML needs are estimated to be more than \$10 billion. In addition, many of the states in Appalachia are facing slashed state budgets, and are challenged by other emergencies such as the opioid crises. However, local communities are finding new innovative ways pursue reclamation, remediation and economic development in the face of a declining coal industry. Unfortunately these areas are plagued by limited access to the necessary resources and financial means to bring these investments to the fruition.

What the RECLAIM ACT Does:

The RECLAIM Act of 2019 helps address this problem by releasing \$1 billion from the remaining, unappropriated balance in the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund to states to be spent on reclamation projects in communities impacted by abandoned mine lands and the recent decrease in coal mining. The RECLAIM Act will also incentivize States and Indian tribes to carry out reclamation projects that will create favorable conditions for economic development.

These projects must be conducted in areas that have been adversely affected by a reduction in coal mining related activity and/or in communities that have traditionally relied on coal mining for a substantial portion of their economy. Under the RECLAIM Act, \$195 million will be distributed to uncertified States and tribes with approved AML programs each year from Fiscal Year 2020 to 2024.