

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

Written Testimony

House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related
Agencies

March 21, 2025

Thank you, Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree for holding today's hearing. I appreciate the Committee's willingness to provide me with an opportunity to draw attention to the Abandoned Mine Land (AML) Economic Revitalization program, or the AMLER program. The AML Pilot Program began several years ago in 2015 at the behest of my friend, Congressman Hal Rogers from Kentucky. Before the AML program was created, reclamation of pre-1977 abandoned mine sites, administered by the Department of Interior's Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, were focused on general site cleanup. Under AMLER, funds clean up an abandoned mine land site, but AMLER allows state and local governments to better utilize these reclaimed lands for economic development.

Economic development can include industrial parks, recreational parks, horse trails, etc. in order to improve the economic vitality of former mining sites. Development of these sites helps to stimulate employment in mining communities. The program was available to abandoned mine land sites located in Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. The last few years, more coal mining states and tribal nations were made eligible for AMLER funds. I am proud to have worked with this Committee to include Virginia, Ohio, and Alabama as eligible states. My district is very rural, mountainous, and contains all of the abandoned mine sites in Virginia. My district also ranks 409 out of 435 Congressional Districts in median household income. Which means economic development is extremely helpful for my constituents and localities. AMLER has made former Appalachian mining areas safe by closing mine portals, remediating tailing lagoons, and taking down highwalls. AMLER has also had the benefit of breathing new economic life into an area that has long depended on coal as its industrial driver.

Because of this reclamation program, former mine sites have been transformed into productive areas once again with data center infrastructure, ecotourism destinations, manufacturing sites, and industrial parks. I greatly appreciate the help this Committee has already provided over the years and ask that you all maintain robust funding for the program as this Subcommittee drafts the Fiscal Year 2026 Interior and Environment bill. Additionally, as you draft the bill, I hope that you will consider including some language I had as an amendment last year regarding the perpetual federal deed interest on AMLER sites. I know I worked with you last year on this Mr. Chairman. I hope you will take this problem into account when looking at the AMLER program.

I know last year I heard from one county in my district that wouldn't apply for the program because they were concerned about a possible perpetual federal interest. A term of years is preferable to protect federal interests. I would propose seven, but even as much as fifteen, seems far more reasonable than "in perpetuity." Uncertainty over whether the federal government can come in at any time and control the property really does have a chilling effect on potential developers. This is a great program and I think that pausing and clarifying perpetual federal interest would really encourage even more projects to be completed in coal mining communities.

Thank you for allowing me to testify. If any Member has any questions, I would be more than happy to address them.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H. Morgan Griffith", written over a horizontal line.

H. Morgan Griffith
Member of Congress