

Chairman H. Morgan Griffith
Opening Statement—Subcommittee on Environment:
“Maximizing Opportunities for Redeveloping Brownfields
Sites: Assessing the Potential for New American Innovation”
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As Prepared for Delivery

Today, this Subcommittee will examine the implementation of the Environmental Protection Agency’s Brownfields grant program.

Brownfields are generally described as properties that contain or may contain a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant, which in turn complicates efforts to expand, redevelop, or reuse the site.

Often, these contaminated sites are not redeveloped, because prospective new owners are worried about becoming responsible for potential liability as the original company that is liable for the contamination no longer exists.

Through this program, EPA provides grant funding to states, Tribes, economic development agencies, and other entities who are then able to study the extent of contamination, clean up the site, and find a way to redevelop it.

Since 1993, EPA has administered efforts to clean up these sites. Congress first formally established the Brownfields program in the Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfields Revitalization Act of 2002, and codified it under the Comprehensive, Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act.

The brownfields program has traditionally enjoyed bipartisan support, and the last statutory authorization expired last September, at the end of Fiscal Year 2023.

Reauthorizing this program will provide us with an opportunity to examine the program and find out what aspects are working well and what aspects need improvement. I believe taking testimony from our witnesses today will help us to inform our efforts.

Additionally, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act provided an unprecedented supplemental appropriation of \$1.5 billion for brownfields. The awards funded under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act were exempted from some of the traditional statutory limitations, such as certain maximum grant amounts and state and local cost share requirements. We will need to examine these changes and understand their advantages and disadvantages.

EPA estimates there are more than 450,000 brownfields properties in the United States. This amounts to a lot of unused or underutilized land with economic potential.

Broadly we also know that we will need additional infrastructure and facilities to support our growing economy and process the materials and components needed for new innovative technologies.

The Brownfields program may also be a good tool to help secure American leadership in emerging industries and traditional manufacturing.

For example, ABI Research, an industry analysis firm, estimates that by the end of 2025, there will be over 6,000 data centers built worldwide as artificial intelligence continues to take off.¹

Over the next five years, our country's electricity demand is expected to grow by almost 16 percent.² This growing demand will entail construction of additional energy resources.

So, today we will examine opportunities to bring those industries to Brownfields sites in our communities and explore existing barriers to putting these sites to good use.

In my district in Southwest Virginia, counties, state agencies, regional organizations, and public-private partnerships have already been hard at work revitalizing former mine land for economic development.³

I hope we can learn more today about how the Brownfields Program can support these endeavors and similar ones around the country.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here and contributing to these efforts.

First, we have the Honorable Jim Connaughton, Chief Executive Officer of James L. Connaughton Strategies where he works on sustainable technology innovation and public policy.

Mr. Connaughton recently served as CEO of Nautilus Data Technologies, a company producing data center components with minimal environmental impacts. He also served as Chairman of the White House Counsel on Environmental Quality under President Bush.

As you all know, this Committee has been engaged in robust discussion over the past few years on ways to improve the permitting process generally, so we welcome his extensive experience in this area.

We also welcome back Mayor Christian Bollwage from the City of Elizabeth, New Jersey.

The Committee greatly appreciates him lending his knowledge and expertise to our efforts to reauthorize the Brownfields Program.

We will also hear from Christa Stoneham, President and CEO of the Houston Land Bank. Thank you for being here to share your insights on the program and efforts to revitalize the areas your organization serves.

¹ [ABI Research: How Many Data Centers are There and Where are they Being Built](#)

² [NPR: U.S. Electricity Demand is Set to Explode. That Will Make it Harder to Cut Climate Pollution](#)

³ [Cardinal News: 4 Southern Virginia Projects Receive \\$10 Million in Funding](#)

Last but not least, I am excited to welcome my constituent Duane Miller, Executive Director of the LENOWISCO Planning District Commission. My staff and I have had the privilege of working with the Commission for years. They've played an integral role in attracting emerging industries to our region, creating jobs, and cleaning up abandoned sites in Southwest Virginia.

Thank you all for being here, and I look forward to a good discussion. I now recognize the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, Mr. Tonko, for his opening statement.