



Dedicated to Mine Land Reclamation, Conservation, & Economic Development in the Wyoming Valley

**Testimony of Michael A. Dziak
President and CEO of Earth Conservancy
before the Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee
Public Hearing on the Environmental and Economic Impacts
of Pennsylvania's Waste Coal Facilities**

October 11, 2016

Good morning, Majority Chairman Yaw, Minority Chairman Yudichak, and members of the Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Mike Dziak and I am President and CEO of Earth Conservancy.

Earth Conservancy is a nonprofit organization dedicated to addressing the impacts of historical anthracite coal mining in northeastern Pennsylvania. We were founded in 1992 by a coalition of government, business, education, and community leaders. The group, after raising \$16 million in grants and private contributions, purchased 16,496 acres of land from the former Blue Coal Corporation, which had declared bankruptcy in the mid-1970s. The mission then, as it is now, was to lead our local communities in the reclamation of mine-scarred lands and streams, returning strong economic, environmental, and social value to the region by creating a well-planned, vibrant valley, protected by green ridgetops.

In order to do this, Earth Conservancy carries out several key activities. We develop sustainable land use plans; reclaim damaged minelands and watersheds; pursue the preservation of 10,000 acres of land for recreation and open space; and educate the public about our work. This is all done in extensive collaboration with our local communities.

As of today, we have reclaimed more than 2,000 acres of damaged land that are now already in or available for constructive use across industrial, commercial, residential, and recreational

sectors. We have also undertaken many projects to mitigate acid mine drainage – also known as AMD – in area watersheds. Our work has earned us numerous federal, state, and local awards, including six Pennsylvania Governor’s Awards for Environmental Excellence. Over \$45.5 million has been invested in our work to date. All of these projects trace back to Earth Conservancy’s overarching plan, one that seeks a more livable community now, and clears the way for positive, progressive change for future generations.

Recovery of waste coal from our sites is critical to the reclamation of our legacy mine lands. Across the Wyoming Valley are massive piles of spoils, or culm banks. Culm banks are made up of thousands – sometimes millions – of tons of cast-off silt, coal, and other rocks from the mining process. Some stretch acres-wide and stories-high. Most have little vegetation. Often, they have been described as a “moonscape,” with the barren banks towering above trees and homes. However, they are more than an eyesore. The culm banks are unstable, prone to slumping, erosion, complete slope failure, or even fire, which makes them a public safety concern. They also impair the environment by reducing wildlife habitat and leaching AMD.

The services provided by the cogeneration industry help turn these damaged tracts into places of potential. Re-mining removes the coal refuse and puts it toward beneficial uses, including electricity production. This supports economic activity, reduces the use of natural resources, restores the environment, and lowers reclamation costs.

In relation to Earth Conservancy, cogeneration facilities are an important partner in our work. Reclamation of mine-scarred lands is expensive. On average, reclamation costs nearly \$18,000 per acre. As a nonprofit, Earth Conservancy relies on grant funding to support its work. If removal of the waste coal was added into our fees, reclamation of the land would be cost-prohibitive. In addition, for legacy minelands like ours, the burden for reclamation would be on the State, and thus the taxpayers.

At present, seven of Earth Conservancy’s major projects have used resource recovery prior to our reclamation work. These have included

- **Franklin Bank:** Franklin Bank was a 15-acre tract in Hanover Township, Pennsylvania, that was adjacent to an existing residential neighborhood. Approximately 150,000 tons of waste coal was recovered from the site, and Earth Conservancy reclaimed the site through a Brownfields Cleanup grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. At present, a new development of 46 homes is under construction.
- **Huber Bank:** Huber was a large, 180-acre culm bank directly across from the first exit of S.R. 29. As the first sight greeting visitors to the Hanover Industrial Estates – and the South Valley – it created a negative impression and impeded its reuse. Over 800,000 tons of material were recovered from the site, with residual ash being used to help reclaim other sections of the property. The majority of the site was sold to a national developer in 2014 and currently is being prepared for construction activities. On another section, government offices have been built and an expansion of a local company is imminent.
- **Bliss Bank:** Bliss Bank is another large, mine-scarred tract, running along one of the South Valley's main thoroughfares and located across from Luzerne County Community College. During the recovery process, 700,000 tons of coal were recouped from the site. Earth Conservancy has just completed the first phase of reclamation activities and is about to begin engineering work for Phase II. Once completed, Bliss will be another prime opportunity for land reuse in the region, as it will be adjacent to the final roundabout of the South Valley Parkway, an \$84 million infrastructure investment in the South Valley.
- **Truesdale Bank:** One of Earth Conservancy's next initiatives is to address multiple impairments from legacy mining to the headwater complexes of the Nanticoke Creek, several of which are located within Truesdale Bank. Approximately 900,000 tons of mining refuse were processed on-site, making 180 acres ready for reclamation, future development, and stream restoration work.

A summary of acreage and recovery totals for Earth Conservancy projects is included as

Attachment A. Before and after images of reclamation activities are included in Attachment A, as well.

To date, over 20 million tons of coal refuse has been processed from Earth Conservancy sites. This means that at a 40% recovery rate, 8 million tons were burned in the generation of electricity. Furthermore, over 570 acres of legacy minelands have been readied for reclamation and eventual reuse. Earth Conservancy is also managing the re-mining of another 300-acre culm bank, located within what is now part of the Pinchot State Forest near Mocanaqua. We estimate that 3.5 million tons of material will be processed from this bank, which will complete the recovery of useable material from Earth Conservancy's properties.

Earth Conservancy would not have been able to reach this milestone without the involvement of waste coal facilities. We see the industry's work as in keeping with our own mission, helping to address the damages from historic mining in ways that benefit both the environment and the community. Cogeneration not only produces electricity efficiently, yielding lower emissions than conventional plants and avoiding the use of natural resources; but also creates a byproduct useful in the reclamation process. Furthermore, in re-mining the culm banks, mine-scarred sites are left in a condition better than when they were found. Safety and aesthetics are improved. Environmental impairments such as erosion, sedimentation, and acidic discharges are reduced. Habitat is repaired. And all of this is done in a cost-effective manner.

In closing, the cogeneration industry has contributed greatly to Earth Conservancy's success in reclaiming thousands of acres of mine-scarred land in Luzerne County. Their work makes environmental and economic sense, helping to return idle lands to productivity, while allowing pristine greenspace to remain untouched.