ILLINOIS' mining... Saving Species

Mining by its nature can have a significant impact on the environment, including plant and animal species. Threatened and endangered species (T&E) have special protections under mining laws. These may including avoidance of areas, limiting disturbances to certain times of the year, or specialized reclamation to provide critical habitat.

Currently and historically mined minerals in Illinois include coal, limestone, sand and gravel, clays and shales, industrial sand, tripoli and others. Many surface mines and underground mines have actively participated in protecting T&E species.

Protection and Enhancement

For example, abandoned tripoli underground mines in Union County provide hibernacula for T&E species such as the Indiana and Northern long-eared bats. UNIMIN has been instrumental in constructing bat gates to allow bats to come and go and prevent human disturbance to the bats. The Abandoned Mined Lands Division which reclaims older prelaw mines has also installed bat gates at open Galena mines in northwest Illinois.

Aggregate companies have participated in the creation of the Habitat Conservation Plan for the endangered Hines Emerald Green Dragonfly in Will County and for the protection of a rare fen (a calcareous marsh in NW Cook county with endangered plants and numerous insect species.)

Habitat Reclamation

Reclaimed surface coal mines have created grassland habitat for the endangered Henslow Sparrow and water and wetland habitat for the once endangered Trumpeter Swan and other T&E bird species that utilize reclaimed land including the Pied-Billed Grebe, American Bittern, Loggerhead Shrike, Upland Sandpiper, Northern Harrier and Short-Eared and Barn Owls in Perry and Jackson counties.

Henslow Sparrow

Trumpeter Swan

Pied-Billed Grebe

American Bittern

Loggerhead Shrike

Upland Sandpiper

Northern Harrier

Short-Eared Owl

Barn Owl

Rice Rat

Bald Eagle

In addition, wetland reclamation at mines throughout southern Illinois has created and restored critical habit helping to allow the once threatened Rice Rat to be removed from the T&E species list. In addition, bald eagles are commonplace visitors to coal and aggregate mines and occasional nesters on mined ground throughout Illinois.

Saving a Species

Many coal companies participated in a highly successful project in the 1970's to restore the Giant Canada Goose, once thought to be extinct during the 1950's. Stream replacement projects under curent relamtion laws have created thousands of acres of riparian habitat for these species.

Illinois Department of Natural Resources

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