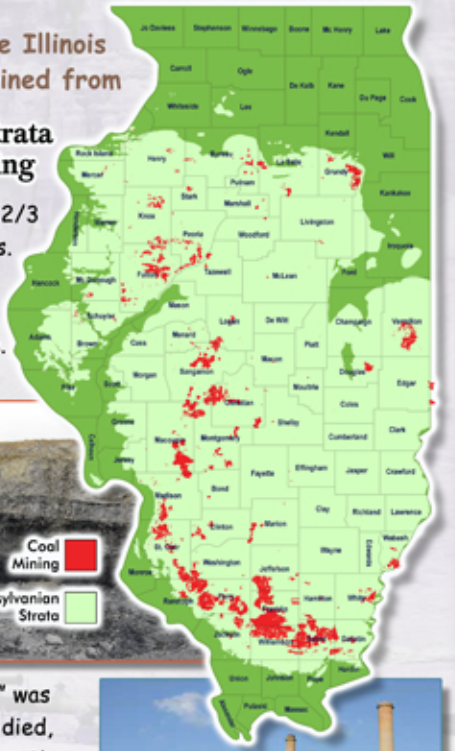
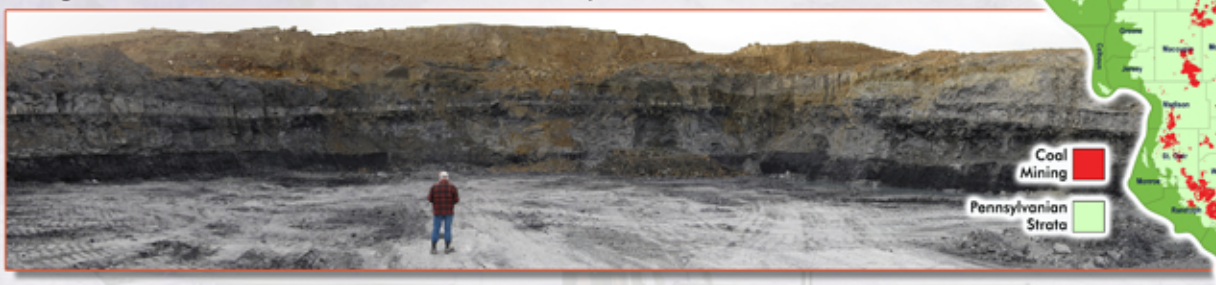
ILLINOIS' mining... Coal and Peat

Coal was "discovered" in 1673 in outcrops along the Illinois River in LaSalle county. Coal has probably been mined from exposed outcrops since prehistoric times.

Pennsylvanian Strata /Coal Mining



Coal bearing strata underlies the majority of the southern 2/3 of the state with over 38 billion tons of recoverable reserves. The first mining was documented in 1810 when outcrop coal was surface mined and loaded onto barges in Jackson County and then shipped to New Orleans. Underground mining began later in the 1840's in St. Clair County near Belleville. Mining has occurred in 76 of the 102 Illinois counties by over 7400 mines.



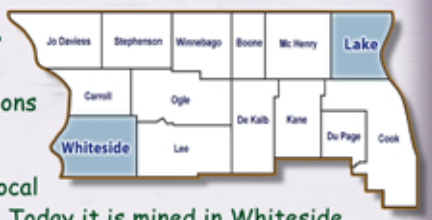
Coal formation in the state began about 300 million years ago when the land now called "Illinois" was near the equator. Ferns and rushes grew as tall as trees in tropical swamps. When these plants died, they accumulated in thick deposits forming peat. Layers of thick sediment covered the areas creating pressure and heat which converted peat to coal. Originally coal was burned for home heating and railroad engine fuel. Illinois coal is now primarily used for electrical generation although some is suitable for steel making and other industrial processing that requires steam.

Carbon in coal can be extracted for the same uses as carbon extracted from oil. Hundreds of different items such as diesel, gas, medicine, solvents and rubber are manufactured from carbon.

Environmental regulations reduce coal burning impacts on the air through stack emission scrubber requirements. Impacts of coal extraction on the land are minimized by reclamation regulations.

Peat

Peat is formed in vegetated swamps and is considered the precursor to coal. The peat mined in Illinois today originated in post glacial swamps from 10,000 years ago that have dried up leaving accumulations of organic matter.



Peat mining began in the 1850's as a source of local fuel for heating but was soon replaced by coal. Today it is mined in Whiteside County and Lake County for use as a soil amendment and for potting soil.

Illinois Department of Natural Resources

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