



Overview of Vol.1, No.4 - Drastically Altered Land

Drastically Altered Lands, An Opportunity

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These six reviews of land reclamations deal with sites that have been drastically altered by industry and society, readily appearing scarred. The previously intact ecosystems have been so completely removed that they would likely require hundreds of years to rehabilitate. In some cases, no form of vegetation will grow on these sites without drastic intervention. Within these reclamation reviews the mining of coal, metals, peat, and stone are discussed, as well as human waste water management and wetland mitigation. These issues are worldwide and intrinsically tied to increased individual consumption rates and population growth. The reviews bring to the forefront the impact people make on the land, and the consequences of that impact. It is important to understand both the motivation that prompts these land scarring activities as well as the motivation that prompts the reclamation of these lands. These insights will be crucial in gaining a deeper understanding of the problems regarding land use and consumption of natural resources, and thus, the scope and meaning of possible solutions.

Behind each of these six reviewed reclamation projects, there is a motivation which effects its success in some way. Each reviewer touches on these motivations. Michael Smith's review of a 3,600 acre reclamation in Ontario, Canada depicts a historical aesthetic that concentrated on making things tidy and green in an otherwise dead landscape. Stephanie Neid points out the conflicting dual motivation in a Minnesota project where the biology of a wetland mitigation and the engineering of a catchment pond run-off system are at odds. Jason Bidwell addresses the motivation in an Alaskan strip mining site to gain public support for a reclamation project. This motivation materialized in denser plantings and larger seedlings being placed in areas of high visibility. Mary Peterson discusses a quarry site project in Colorado where "little interest was shown in chemical use to speed oxidation of the exposed rock face solely for aesthetic reasons, even though the scar has visibility from several points in the Boulder County area". Steve Roos sites motivation behind raised bog reclamation to include their value as a biological and renewable consumable resource. J. Mitch Allan presents a project in California where the human impact on the site (wastewater) is used to sustain wildlife habitat, as well as to provide recreation and education for the local community.

Each of these reclamation projects pursued a different level of insight into its own meaning in relation to society and in relation to the original land alteration, such as mining. Meaning is critical because reclamations have the potential to effect people's attitudes and actions. Reclamations can be much more

than scientists cleaning up after industrialists and society in general.

FIXING THINGS

It is not enough to quietly go behind and fix things. That is, if fixing things means making them invisible by covering up the scars for the aesthetic sensibility of society. Attempting to make sites look "natural" or "aesthetic" is in a sense, making destructive activities and their consequences invisible. There are instances in these reviewed reclamations where this aesthetic fixing is explicitly carried out, especially on particularly visible edges of projects. If drastically altered land reclamations are quietly made invisible, then society will have no base for changing behaviors. This is not meant to necessarily promote leaving open wounds untreated and unhealed. It instead points out that these drastically altered sites hold the tremendous opportunity to create very real and visible landscapes that can involve and promote conversation among the public. Reclamation can be a healing of some of the damage visited on natural systems, but it can also be an edification. The visual language of the reclamation can directly communicate its relevant issues. The reclamation is an opportunity to create a didactic landscape, one that points out the natural, altered and reclamation history of the site as well as a systemic view of the world. The didactic landscape then helps people interpret their own interrelationship with the land, including their dependence upon its health and the consumption of its resources.

IMAGES OF HOPE

Reclamations of drastically altered lands are huge scientific and engineering endeavors. At the same time, they are cultural endeavors, imbued with meaning by their very nature. In order to become educational and interpretive, projects such as these should open the doors between concerned disciplines such as science, engineering, landscape architecture and art. Thus bringing together a variety of creative people and their insights in order to heal, educate and offer images of hope concerning positive solutions.