

Governor disappointed in AML funding announcement

By [Sarah Hale](#) on Dec 10, 2007 in [News](#)

The announcement from the federal Office of Surface Mining that abandoned mine lands back payments to Wyoming will be distributed through a grant process, rather than in direct payments to the state, was met with disappointment by Gov. Dave Freudenthal.

"It is good news that we will get the money, but it is disappointing that the federal government has found a way to add more paperwork to the process," Freudenthal said. "Our Congressional delegation deserves credit for working hard on legislation to ensure that we do get the funding that rightly belongs to Wyoming."

For decades the federal government has failed to pay Wyoming its full entitlement under the Abandoned Mine Lands program and currently owes the state approximately \$600 million. The funds were expected to have been distributed in seven annual payments of approximately \$82 million, beginning this month.

Sen. Mike Enzi called the OSM's document "misguided," and said the agency had misinterpreted legislation that he had drafted to require that the funding be redistributed in payments, not as grants.

The OSM is "planning on making Wyoming jump through more hoops than was intended by Congress," Enzi said in joint news release with Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., John Barrasso, R-Wyo., and Representative Barbara Cubin, R-Wyo. that criticized the OSM decision.

John Corra, Director of the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, said that the OSM will now expect Wyoming to spend up to \$30 million of its \$82 million prior balance payment on abandoned coal mine reclamation next year due to reductions in the AML program's bottom line.

"The basis for OSM's expectation stems from Wyoming's aggressive abandoned mine lands reclamation program," Corra said.

Since DEQ has not completed its work in reclaiming the state's abandoned mines, Corra said it will continue with an active reclamation program until the state's inventory has been exhausted.

"The remaining portion of the \$82 million can be spent as the Legislature chooses, but must be submitted in grant form to the OSM," Corra said. "The OSM will require only minimal details for the non-reclamation projects, and will authorize the release of funds as actual spending occurs. In other words, the \$82 million is not a payment that we will receive, but rather a line of credit that we can draw from as spending occurs."

In the coming weeks, DEQ will finalize reclamation plans with OSM, and a clear picture of funds available to the Legislature will emerge, Corra said.