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## Wood waste used to successfully reclaim mined bentonite lands

CHEYENNE (AP) — Wood waste from timber processing has been used to successfully reclaim desolate bentonite mined land near Upton and establish a healthy stand of grass in the area, state officials say.

The Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality said in a news release this week the project began in 1979, when the agency's Land Quality Division agreed with the state forester to try wood chips in reclaiming state lands that were surfaced mined for bentonite.

Tod Sedbrook of the state forester's office said the experiment showed that using wood chips as a mulch helped water infiltrate the topsoil, improved vegetation and reduced the shrinking and swelling of bentonite in the soil.

"It may be one of the best methods to reclaim bentonite mined land," Sedbrook said in the DEQ release.

And, he said, some Wyoming bentonite companies are already using the method to reclaim land.

Reclamation of land mined for bentonite has been hampered by a depressed market for the mineral and the low rainfall and scarcity of high quality topsoil found in bentonite lands in the big producing states of Wyoming, Montana and South Dakota, the DEQ said.

An abandoned site on state land four miles northwest of Upton in northeastern Wyoming was chosen to test the wood chip reclamation theory.

The land was mined by private companies in the mid-1960s, before the Wyoming Environmental Quality Act required reclamation by salvaging topsoil, landscaping and seeding sites.

No reclamation had taken place at the 18-acre Upton site, and no topsoil was saved, which left raw spoil material to be reclaimed, the

DEQ release said.

STAFF FROM the state forester's office with help from the High Plains Grasslands Research Station are evaluating effects of three levels of wood chips incorporated into bentonite spoils to establish and produce vegetation, the DEQ said.

They also are studying the best combination of wood chips, nitrogen fertilizer and seeds, both native and non-native, for the best results.

The monitoring will continue through 1985, the DEQ said.

Preliminary results were so encouraging, the DEQ and the state forester's office are financing a second test in the same area with more experimentation with wood chips, Sedbrook said.

Bentonite is a clay used in oil and gas drilling, to manufacture medicine and castings and to process taconite ore.

## Wood Chips Used Successfully In Bentonite Reclamation

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