What GAO Found

Surface coal mining in Kentucky and West Virginia had the following important characteristics, based on permits issued from January 1990 through July 2008:

- The number of acres under open permit increased by an average annual rate of 2.2 percent in Kentucky and 1.7 percent in West Virginia.
- The number of acres under open permit became more geographically concentrated.
- The length of time that permits were open varied from less than a year to more than 18 years.
- In West Virginia, 28 contiguously permitted areas contained nearly half of the permitted acres, as of July 2008.

Reclaimed lands had the following important characteristics, based on permits issued from January 2000 through July 2008:

- The most common type of post-mining land use in Kentucky was fish and wildlife habitat and, in West Virginia, it was forestland.
- Most permits required operators to reclaim the land to AOC, but there were some exceptions (called variances). Most of the variances were for lands where there was insufficient spoil to restore AOC because the land had been previously mined but not reclaimed.
- Kentucky and West Virginia collectively approved nearly 2,000 fills to store at least 4.9 billion cubic yards of excess spoil in nearby valleys.

View GAO-10-21 or key components. For more information, contact Robin Nazzaro at (202) 512-3841 or nazzaror@gao.gov.