

News Details

Legacy Bristlecone Pines Planted for Reclamation at CC&V
December 8, 2016

In 1998, in the area that would become the Cripple Creek & Victor Gold Mine's (CC&V's) Main Cresson Surface Mine, employees of CC&V's environmental department harvested thousands of Bristlecone Pine seeds. The Rocky Mountain Bristlecone Pine Tree (*Pinus aristata*) is a species native to very high altitudes of Colorado and northern New Mexico. They occupy a cold, dry subalpine ecosystem at elevations between 7,000 to 13,000 feet. In these harsh conditions, reclaiming landscape to pre-mining ecosystems takes planning, persistence, patience, and foresight.

18 years ago, CC&V had the foresight to send those harvested seeds to Great Bear Restoration, in Hamilton Montana, where these legacy seeds were stored using innovative tools that kept them viable. Then, in 2015, Great Bear Restoration, which also operates a premier native plant restoration nursery, planted, sprouted and grew about 600 bristlecone pine seedlings to a height of about 6 inches.



Rocky Mountain Bristlecone Pine Seedling

In the fall of 2016, these seedlings were returned to the Cripple Creek and Victor, Colorado, area where they were planted as part of CC&V's on-going reclamation of its East Cresson Surface Mine. Historically (c. 1900), this location encompassed the former town site of the City of Altman, which, at an elevation of 10,650 feet, was proclaimed at the time to be "the highest incorporated city in the world." In tribute to this history, CC&V refers to this area as the Altman Reclamation Site.



Altman Reclamation Site

Reclamation at the Altman Site began about seven years ago. As planned, the surface mine was backfilled with overburden from other mined areas, and then re-contoured (sloped) to match the adjacent area which had not been mined in the modern era. Top-soil that was patiently stored for reclamation purposes was spread over the site, treated with soil amendments, and native grasses, shrubs (current, wild rose, etc.), transplanted bristlecone pines and now bristlecone seedlings have been planted. Wildlife habitat has been established using larger rocks and deadfall trees, and the historic Grace Greenwood Gallows Frame (Headframe) was relocated to the site as part of CC&V's on-going historic preservation.



Grace Greenwood & Flagged Seedlings

The placement of the Grace Greenwood at this location ties the reclaimed landscape of the East Cresson Reclamation Site into the Vindicator Valley below with its historic structures and interpretive public trails.



The Vindicator Valley

On Bull Hill, east of the Altman Reclamation Site, there is a mature stand of approximately 1000 bristlecone pines. Growing at high elevations, Rocky Mountain Bristlecone Pine trees are typically thought of as short and stunted, but in the right conditions, like those in Pikes Peak Region of Colorado, one of their most easterly environments, they can reach heights up to 35 feet. With the persistence of a responsible mining company, and under the foresighted care of Newmont CC&V's environmental department, these legacy bristlecone pine saplings will successfully tie this reclaimed area back into the pre-modern mining ecosystem as planned.