Mining makes holes. In the past, after mining ceased, the pits, underground works, processing wastes, and surface facilities were generally abandoned with little thought of reuse. New public sensibilities, government regulations, interests in sustainability, and economic conditions make it desirable, if not actually necessary, to consider reusing mined lands. Planning for economic reuses before operations commence leads to greater incomes, better outcomes, and increased public acceptance of mining. A number of reuses are currently in place in Indiana and elsewhere, and many novel, new, and varied additional opportunities may be implemented in the future.

More than 500,000 abandoned mine sites are estimated to exist in the United States. Most of these are small, and although some have been reclaimed by design or through natural processes, many mines are left in less than optimal conditions. In Indiana, more than 516,000 acres have been affected by past mining, and several hundred active mines are currently operating, even in this small state. Because transport costs of industrial minerals are so important, many aggregate operations are close to cities. Such sites can be modified into very well-placed and attractive building sites. Conventional reuses are already common, especially for agriculture or redevelopment as office parks, industrial sites, subdivisions, parks, and even art parks. Less conventional reuses should also be considered. Storage sites, sources of low temperature geothermal waters, reservoirs for process waters, energy production or storage sites, water control structures, sports or civic venues, and tourist destinations are also possible reuses for mined sites. Examples of such reuses, such as the Eden Project, which converted an old clay mine into a showplace, exist mainly in Europe, but opportunities could be exploited in the Midwest. Long-range thinking and creative reuse projects will help mining industries by continuing or extending the useful lives of sites, providing income, contributing to community health, gaining environmental improvements, generating increased recreation or cultural venues, enhancing the education of the public, and showing sustainable land uses.