Study finds that damaged land can restore itself

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There is widespread interest in restoring land damaged by gravel-sand mining, but the high costs of such projects can be off-putting. A new study published in *Restoration Ecology* offers remarkable new evidence that these damaged environments can be effectively restored within a matter of years, and at virtually no cost.

According to the study, damaged sites can be restored without human interference by spontaneous revegetation (or vegetation succession), whereby plants from the area surrounding disused gravel-sand pits move in and take root. Simply by leaving abandoned mines alone they will naturally restore themselves within just twenty-five years.

These findings have major repercussions for the way in which restoration projects are considered around the world. Rather than debating the relative costs and benefits of such projects, the evidence of spontaneous revegetation found in this study may render financial considerations unnecessary. In fact, besides removing invasive plant species before allowing revegetation to begin, human involvement in reclamation is not needed.

“Instead of using expensive technical reclamations it is possible to rely more upon spontaneous succession then is generally expected,” says lead author Klára Øehounková. “For this, it is important to preserve at least some remnants of natural vegetation during mining and postmining operations to act as seed sources of many target species.”

Source: Wiley