Journal of Remote Sensing, Environmental Science & Geotechnical Engineering
Volume 6, Issue 1, January-April, 2021

Remote Sensing In Assessing The Impact Of Mining On Soil Stability And Vegetation

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Abstract

Mining activities significantly alter land surfaces, impacting soil stability and vegetation cover in affected regions. Traditional field surveys are often limited in spatial extent and frequency, posing challenges for comprehensive environmental assessment. Remote sensing offers an efficient, cost-effective, and spatially extensive tool for monitoring mining-induced changes. This paper discusses the application of multispectral and hyperspectral remote sensing techniques in evaluating soil stability and vegetation health in mining areas. Key indicators such as Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) and soil erosion indices derived from satellite data provide insights into degradation patterns. The integration of remote sensing with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) enhances mapping and temporal analysis. Challenges including atmospheric interference and sensor limitations are addressed. Two tables highlight remote sensing satellites commonly used for mining impact studies and compare *vegetation and soil stability indices. The study underscores remote sensing as an indispensable method for environmental monitoring and reclamation planning in mining landscapes.*

KEYWORDS : *Remote sensing, Mining impact, Soil stability, Vegetation monitoring, NDVI, GIS, Environmental assessment*

INTRODUCTION

Mining is a critical economic activity that often leads to significant environmental alterations. Surface mining, in particular, disturbs soil profiles and removes vegetation, increasing susceptibility to erosion and landscape instability. Soil degradation can cause sedimentation in water bodies, affecting aquatic ecosystems, while loss of vegetation disrupts biodiversity and carbon sequestration.

Conventional monitoring methods involving field sampling and surveys are expensive, time-consuming, and limited in spatial coverage. Remote sensing (RS) provides a reliable alternative, offering repetitive, large-area observations capable of detecting landscape changes due to mining operations. This paper explores the application of RS techniques to assess soil stability and vegetation conditions impacted by mining, discussing the methodologies, key indices, advantages, and challenges.

PRINCIPLES OF REMOTE SENSING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING

Remote sensing uses satellite or aerial sensors to detect and record reflected or emitted electromagnetic radiation from the Earth's surface. Variations in spectral reflectance patterns correspond to different land cover types and surface conditions. For mining impact studies, RS enables detection of changes in vegetation vigor and soil exposure.

Multispectral sensors capture data in several broad bands, useful for vegetation indices like NDVI, which relates near-infrared and red reflectance to assess plant health. Hyperspectral sensors provide finer spectral resolution, allowing detailed discrimination of soil mineralogy and stress signals in vegetation.

REMOTE SENSING SATELLITES USED IN MINING IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Satellite	Sensor	Spectral Bands	Spatial Resolution (m)	Revisit Time (days)	Applications
Landsat 8	OLI/TIRS	11 (Multispectral)	30 (visible/NIR), 100 (TIR)	16	Vegetation monitoring, soil erosion
Sentinel-2	MSI	13 (Multispectral)	10–20	5	High-res vegetation and soil assessment
ASTER	VNIR, SWIR, TIR	14	15–90	16	Mineral mapping, soil texture analysis
WorldView-3	Multispectral, SWIR	16	1.24–3.7	<1	Detailed vegetation health, soil degradation
MODIS	Multispectral	36	250–1000	1	Large scale vegetation dynamics, soil moisture

Table 1 presents key remote sensing satellites commonly employed for monitoring mining impacts on soil and vegetation.

VEGETATION AND SOIL STABILITY INDICES IN REMOTE SENSING

To quantify mining impacts, several spectral indices are derived from RS data:

- **Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI):**
  NDVI=NIR−RedNIR+RedNDVI = \frac{NIR - Red}{NIR + Red}NDVI=NIR+RedNIR−Red
  Indicates vegetation health; lower values suggest degradation or sparse vegetation.
- **Soil Adjusted Vegetation Index (SAVI):**
  Accounts for soil brightness, useful in sparsely vegetated mining areas.
- **Normalized Difference Water Index (NDWI):**
  Detects moisture content, relevant to soil stability analysis.
- **Erosion Potential Mapping (EPM):**
  Combines slope, soil texture, and vegetation indices to estimate erosion susceptibility.
- **Bare Soil Index (BSI):**
  Highlights exposed soil patches indicating vegetation loss and increased erosion risk.

TABLE 2: COMPARISON OF VEGETATION AND SOIL STABILITY INDICES

Index	Formula	Purpose	Advantages	Limitations
NDVI	(NIR - Red)/(NIR + Red)	Vegetation vigor	Simple, widely used	Sensitive to soil background
SAVI	((NIR - Red)/(NIR + Red + L))*(1+L)	Vegetation in bare soil areas	Reduces soil influence	Requires parameter L tuning
NDWI	(NIR - SWIR)/(NIR + SWIR)	Vegetation moisture content	Indicates water stress	Affected by atmospheric effects
BSI	((Red + SWIR) - (NIR + Blue))/((Red + SWIR) + (NIR + Blue))	Bare soil detection	Highlights exposed soils	Sensitive to brightness
EPM	Composite of slope, soil, vegetation	Erosion risk mapping	Integrates multiple factors	Data intensive

Table 2 details common indices applied in mining impact studies, emphasizing their strengths and limitations.

APPLICATIONS IN MINING IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Remote sensing facilitates:

- **Monitoring Vegetation Loss:** Continuous NDVI mapping detects vegetation removal and recovery post-mining.
- **Soil Erosion Assessment:** Mapping bare soil extent and erosion-prone slopes aids in identifying vulnerable zones.
- **Land Reclamation Planning:** Spatial data guides reclamation efforts, optimizing vegetation restoration and soil stabilization.
- **Temporal Change Analysis:** Multitemporal RS datasets reveal progressive degradation or successful rehabilitation.
- **Pollution Impact:** Spectral signatures assist in identifying contamination affecting plant growth.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

- **Atmospheric Disturbances:** Cloud cover and haze affect data quality, requiring correction techniques.
- **Spatial Resolution Constraints:** Coarse resolution limits detection of small-scale changes.
- **Spectral Confusion:** Similar spectral responses of different materials can cause classification errors.

- **Seasonal Variability:** Vegetation phenology affects indices; timing of data acquisition is crucial.
- **Ground Truth Dependency:** Validation with field data is necessary for accuracy.

FUTURE TRENDS

- **Integration of UAV and Satellite Data:** Combining high-res UAV imagery with satellite data for detailed assessments.
- **Machine Learning for Classification:** Advanced algorithms improve accuracy in distinguishing mining-induced changes.
- **Hyperspectral Imaging:** Enhanced spectral resolution for detecting subtle vegetation stress and soil contamination.
- **Real-Time Monitoring Platforms:** Cloud computing enables rapid data processing and near real-time analysis.

CONCLUSION

Remote sensing stands as a vital tool in assessing mining impacts on soil stability and vegetation. Its capability for wide-area, repeated observations surpasses traditional methods, offering timely insights into environmental degradation and recovery. The use of vegetation and soil stability indices derived from multispectral and hyperspectral data provides quantitative measures of mining disturbance. Despite challenges, advancements in sensor technology, data analytics, and integration with GIS promise enhanced accuracy and applicability. Remote sensing enables stakeholders to make informed decisions for sustainable mining practices and effective land rehabilitation.

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