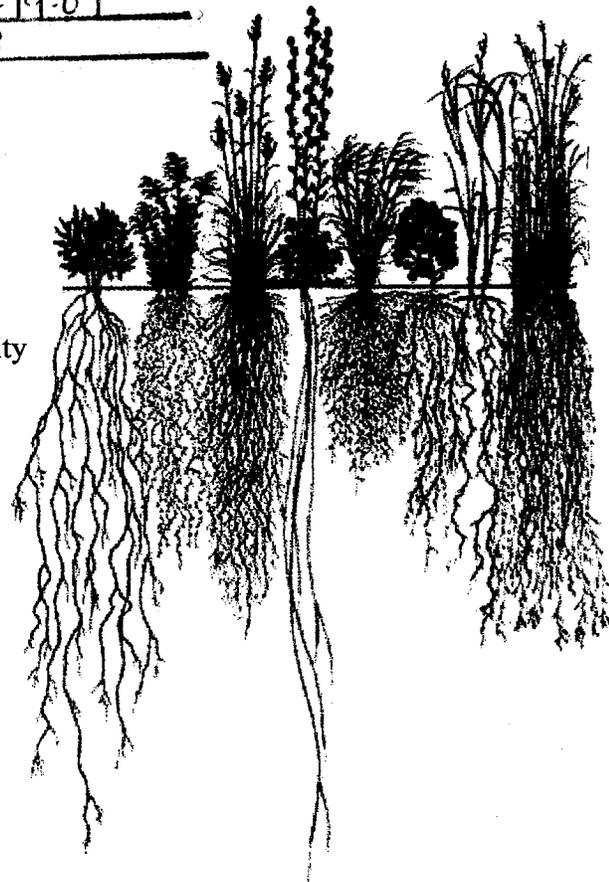


**HB 509: Revising Montana's coal reclamation laws**  
**Sponsored by Representative Ron Erickson**

HB 509 brings the state's coal reclamation law back into compliance with federal standards by requiring effective practices to control erosion and restore vegetation diversity and pre-mine hydrologic balance as basic legal priorities. A clear way to explain the bill's provisions is that they "put the roots back" into reclamation in Montana.

The secret to effective reclamation of mined lands lies underground. Complex, diverse root re-establishment is fundamental to long-term success. Strip mining turns everything upside down. Of course raw regraded spoils (dressed with only a thin layer of reserved topsoil) have poor moisture infiltration and storage characteristics. Establishment of a diverse mix of native grasses, forbs and shrubs supplies the kind of deep and complex root systems needed to minimize erosion and improve soil hydrologic performance.



In 2003, the Montana legislature made reclamation purely relative to post-mine land use and allowed less effective introduced monoculture or near-monoculture plantings instead of establishment of diverse vegetation. In 2005, the federal Office of Surface Mining ruled that such an approach did not comply with minimum national standards for effective reclamation. State law and regulations are now in a confused and contradictory state. HB 509 clearly requires revegetation practices adequate to achieve state-of-the-art erosion control and to restore hydrologic balance irregardless of post-mine land use.

Reclamation to a diverse vegetation standard is a practical and achievable goal. It is being attained at Wyoming mines now. In the next year, the Jacobs Ranch Mine will be requesting final bond release on over 1,000 acres. Montana miners and state personnel should also take note that a number of the Gillette mines have been able to accelerate the reclamation process by using time-controlled livestock grazing to stimulate root development and moisture holding capacity as well as to improve plant density and vigor.

The rangelands of our state are a great and valuable natural resource. They deserve better than second-rate reclamation. As many call for vastly increased strip mining, HB 509 is key to achieving effective reclamation in eastern Montana's coal fields.

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**EFFECTIVE RECLAMATION IN WYOMING**  
To diverse native grasses, forbs and shrub mix  
utilizing time-controlled livestock grazing  
Jacobs Ranch Mine, December, 2006