

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR MINOR REVISION
COAL AND URANIUM PROGRAM
MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY**

COMPANY NAME: Big Sky Coal Company

DATE: May 19, 2009

OPERATING PERMIT#: 83004CR

MR#: 08-04-02A

LOCATION: Area A

Type and Purpose of Action:

Big Sky Coal Company proposes to modify the embankments of three sediment ponds to provide low-water crossings for a permanent ranch road. The reconstructed drainages would blend in with the native, downstream segments; however, a nick-point would be present. To reduce the amount of flow over the embankment, the current drop structure spillways would be left in place after some modification – the drop structure would be cut down, trash collectors installed – and would pass the surface runoff under most conditions. The structures are designed to pass the both the 100-year, 6-hour storm event and the 100-year, 24-hour storm event. A small pool of water, smaller than the permitted small depressions, would be present for a time following runoff events.

Potential Impacts and Mitigation Measures:

There is a potential for surface erosion to occur within the embankment. The design of the structures should limit this. Vehicle access across the low-water crossings could be limited if erosion was extensive.

Alternative Actions:

The entire embankments could have been removed. This would have provided a better blend of the reconstructed drainage with the upstream and downstream stream reaches. It would have eliminated the pool area; therefore, there would be no seasonal accumulation of surface water for use by livestock and wildlife. Additionally, areas of the haul road/impoundment embankment currently vegetated with a mixture of trees and shrubs would have been eliminated.