

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

COMPANY NAME: Spring Creek Coal LLC

DATE: October 28, 2011

PERMIT#: C1979012

REVISION NO: MR160

LOCATION: Spring Creek Mine

Type and Purpose of Action:

Spring Creek Coal LLC is requesting the approval of modifications to the current hydrologic monitoring plan. The changes are:

- 1) Abandonment of six wells and removal of four of the six from the current monitoring plan. Two wells that are requested for abandonment are not currently monitored. The six wells proposed for abandonment are located in the interior of Spring Creek's permit area, and abandonment is due to pit and facilities encroachment.
- 2) Changes in the sampling frequency for four wells installed in 2010 under MR 10-12-08 and MR 10-12-12. The sampling frequency would be reduced to quarterly water level sampling and semi-annually water quality sampling. The initial higher sampling frequency was requested by DEQ for one year.
- 3) Relocation of surface water station SF-1 upstream but within the permit boundary to prevent flooding from the South Fork Spring Creek Flood Control Reservoir.
- 4) Addition of spring "Rainy Spring" to the monitoring plan with monthly flow and semi-annually water quality sampling.

Spring Creek Coal additionally requests the cessation of water quality monitoring at the South Fork Spring Creek Flood Control Reservoir, but the Department does not agree to the request.

Potential Impacts and Mitigation Measures:

No potential negative impacts are anticipated as a result of the proposed changes to the permit. Decreasing the sampling frequency of the four groundwater monitoring wells and abandonment of the six wells listed in the proposal will not adversely affect the monitoring of groundwater quality or quantity in mine-impacted aquifers. Changes in water levels and quality occur slowly in groundwater wells, and the proposed monitoring frequency is at the same sampling frequency of other wells monitored by Spring Creek Coal. Sufficient coverage remains, especially near the permit boundary, with the remaining monitoring wells that the loss of the six wells proposed for removal would not adversely impact groundwater monitoring at the mine.

The relocation of SF-1 may result in an increase in surface water flow and natural water quality data because the stream gauge is less likely to be flooded by reservoir water. The addition of monitoring at Rainy Springs would likewise provide more data on surface water quality. These two changes to surface water monitoring would allow for a better assessment of background water quality and flow characteristics.

Alternative Actions:

No alternatives, other than no action, were considered.

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