

**September 2000 Monthly Report**  
**West Virginia Permitting Activities**  
October 19, 2000

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **Purpose of This Report**

The purpose of this report is to update the West Virginia Congressional Delegation and the public on the status of pending West Virginia surface coal mining permit applications containing plans to construct valley fills. The report covers the activities of the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the Office of Surface Mining (OSM), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the West Virginia Division of Environmental Protection (WVDEP) during the period from September 1, 2000, through September 30, 2000. It relates to both the surface mining program under the authority of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) and water quality programs authorized by the Clean Water Act (CWA). The background for the activities covered by the report and the individual agency responsibilities are discussed in Appendix II.

## **II. PERMIT REVIEW STATUS SUMMARY**

Since the last report listing sixty-eight SMCRA applications for proposed operations and eight revision/amendment applications for previously permitted operations, two applications, Cook Mountain S-5015-94 and Coastal Coal U-2002-00, have received all of the necessary approvals to begin operations. The Cook Mountain permit received SMCRA and CWA Section 402 approvals in 1997. CWA Section 404 approval was applied for and granted in September and CWA Section 401 certification was also approved in September. Since the SMCRA permit was approved prior to initiating these Monthly Reports, it was not included in previous reports. It is now listed on pages 1 and 5 of Appendix I of this report. Another operation which received SMCRA and CWA Section 402 permit approvals in 1997, CC Coal S-3007-96, recently applied for a CWA Section 404 permit and the application has been added to page 2 of Appendix I.

One application for a proposed new operation, Fola Coal S-2011-99, received the last approval needed to begin operations on August 30. However, this information was not received until after the August report was finalized. It is now included on page 5 of Appendix I of this report.

In 1999, Alex Energy received a SMCRA permit (S-3005-98) and CWA approvals for an operation with nine valley fills in watersheds of less than 250 acres. The company recently applied for an amendment to the SMCRA permit which proposes to mine an additional coal seam and increase the watersheds of two previously approved valley fills to 314 and 424 acres. The company has also applied for a CWA Section 404 Individual Permit for the enlarged fills. Both applications are listed on page 4 of Appendix I.

One application for a new operation and one application for a revision to an existing operation were submitted in September. One application, Guyandotte Pocahontas U-4021-99, was removed from the list of pending applications for new operations since all fills were removed. Another application for an amendment to an existing operation, Elk Run S-5057-92, Amd 1, was inadvertently omitted from previous reports and now has been added to page 4 of Appendix I. The number of pending applications for proposed new operations is now sixty-seven and the number of revision/amendment applications is now ten. These seventy-seven applications need at least one of the four approvals necessary to begin operations. Revisions were made to the September estimated decision dates for eight SMCRA applications and two revision/amendment applications. The following is a list of the applications and an explanation of why the estimated decision date was revised:

- " Vandalia Resources S-2012-98 The applicant has requested an extension. The estimated decision date is now January 2001.
- " Tom L. Scholl S-3004-99 Pending submission of corrections by the applicant. The estimated decision date is now December.
- " Marfork Coal U-3002-99 Pending submission of corrections by the applicant. The estimated decision date is now January 2001.
- " Bluestone Coal U-4009-99 Pending submission of bond by the applicant. The estimated decision date is now December.
- " Mid-Vol Leasing S-4019-99 Pending submission of bond by the applicant. The estimated decision date is now December.
- " CC Coal S-5009-99 Pending submission of corrections and bond by the applicant. The estimated decision date is now February 2001.
- " Independence Coal S-5025-97 Pending submission of corrections by the applicant. The estimated decision date is now February 2001.
- " Evergreen O-2011-98 Pending completion of a CHIA. The estimated decision date is now December.
- " CC Coal S-3007-96, IBR 1 Pending review of corrections submitted by the applicant. The estimated decision date is now December.
- " Wyoming Pocahontas U-4019-94, IBR 8 Pending submission of corrections by the applicant. The estimated decision date is now June 2001.

### III. APPENDICES

Appendix I - *West Virginia Permitting Status*

Appendix II - *Background and Agency Responsibilities and Coordination*

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## APPENDIX II

### **Background**

There are four environmental permits and/or approvals needed for any coal mining operation proposing to place mining material (excess spoil) in the waters of the United States, i.e., to construct a valley fill. These include a surface coal mining permit issued under authority of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA), and three approvals/permits issued under authority of the Clean Water Act (CWA). The CWA approvals/permits consist of a Section 402 National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit, a Section 401 water quality certification, and a Section 404 permit. Five agencies have primary responsibilities related to the review and/or issuance of these approvals/permits; the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the Office of Surface Mining (OSM), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the West Virginia Division of Environmental Protection (WVDEP).

In West Virginia, federal authorization to issue three of the four required approvals/permits has been delegated to WVDEP. The authority to issue the fourth permit, the CWA Section 404 permit, is with COE. Section 404 permits can be either a General Permit for discharges that have only minimal adverse effects or an Individual Permit for projects that have impacts above the minimal level to the waters of the United States.

In the summer of 1998, several West Virginia citizens and the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy filed suit against WVDEP and COE in Federal District Court claiming approval of valley fills and other mining practices were resulting in an inappropriate application of the requirements of CWA and the approved West Virginia program under SMCRA. In December 1998, the parties to the suit, as well as EPA, FWS, and OSM, negotiated a Settlement Agreement for the portions of the litigation dealing with COE activities. The Settlement Agreement committed EPA, COE, OSM, FWS, and WVDEP to two major activities:

1. Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement considering policies, guidance and decision-making processes to minimize certain adverse environmental effects of mountaintop mining operations and to environmental resources that could be affected by the size and location of valley fills, and
2. Develop an interim permitting process, including a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), providing for interagency coordination to ensure compliance with all applicable federal and State requirements. The interim approach also requires an Individual Permit under Section 404 of CWA for any mountaintop mining operation in West Virginia that has more than minimal adverse effects to the waters of the United States (as specified by the Settlement Agreement, generally those with fills in streams draining watersheds of 250 acres and greater, or those with more than minimal cumulative adverse impacts).

The required MOU was signed by the five agencies on April 7, 1999. This report addresses the MOU and the interim permitting activities discussed under paragraph 2 above. It includes permitting activities for all pending applications proposing to construct valley fills, regardless of whether they qualify for a General Permit or require an Individual Permit under Section 404 of CWA. It includes applications undergoing review by COE or WVDEP at the time the settlement agreement was signed, as well as additional applications received since that time.

### **Agency Coordination and Responsibilities**

Each of the five signatory agencies to the Settlement Agreement have specific duties and responsibilities under applicable laws and regulations. A brief description of these duties follows.

WVDEP is the first agency approached when a mine operator seeks the necessary environmental approvals and permits to conduct a proposed surface coal mining operation. It is responsible for implementation, administration, and enforcement of the SMCRA regulatory program in West Virginia. This includes review and approval of permit applications for surface mining operations as well as inspection and enforcement at the mine site until reclamation responsibilities are completed and all performance bonds are released. WVDEP also has responsibility for the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program for coal mining operations in accordance with Section 402 of CWA and the water quality certification required by Section 401 of CWA.

COE is the agency authorized by Section 404 of CWA to issue permits regulating the discharge of dredged or fill material into the waters of the United States, including valley fills. These permits consist of two basic types, Individual Permits which are specific to a particular site and Nationwide permits which are issued under the General Permit process. General Permits may be granted for discharges that have no more than minimal adverse impacts on the waters of the United States. If the discharge may have more than minimal impacts, an Individual Permit under Section 404 of CWA is required. These Individual Permits can be issued only after practicable alternatives which are less damaging to the aquatic environment have been considered and it is determined that the waters of the United States will not be significantly degraded.

EPA is responsible for providing technical assistance to COE for the CWA Section 404 regulatory program and oversight of and technical assistance to WVDEP for the NPDES program.

FWS is responsible for the implementation, administration, and enforcement of the Endangered Species Act. In addition, under the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, agencies proposing projects affecting waters of the United States are required to consult with FWS to ensure that fish and wildlife conservation is considered along with other features. Coordination with FWS is required for both SMCRA and CWA actions.

OSM is responsible for oversight of and technical assistance to the SMCRA regulatory program implemented by WVDEP. The oversight provisions of SMCRA do not provide for direct federal review of permit applications nor grant veto authority over the issuance of a specific permit. However, for activities under the MOU, OSM is providing technical assistance to the WVDEP by reviewing pending applications and coordinating with other federal agencies.