

News Release



USDA Forest Service
Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests
2250 Highway 50
Delta, CO 81416-2485

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact(s): Lee Ann Loupe, Public Affairs Specialist, 970.596.0246

DECISION RELEASED FOR VENTILATION SHAFT (AND ESCAPEWAY) ON WEST ELK MINE

Delta, CO., (August 20, 2007) – The Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forest released the *Deer Creek Shaft and E Seam Methane Drainage Wells Project Final Environmental Impact Statement* (FEIS) and the decision to allow the construction of the Deer Creek Shaft at Mountain Coal Company’s West Elk Mine. The shaft will provide additional ventilation to underground coal mining activities and an escape-way for enhanced safety for workers. The access to the shaft and a pad where the shaft/escapeway will be placed already exist and were approved in separate environmental analysis in 2006 for geotechnical exploration.

“This decision also provides my concurrence to the federal Office of Surface Mine Reclamation and Enforcement to recommend approval [to the USDI Undersecretary] to modify the mining plan for the West Elk Mine to include the construction and operation the shaft/escape-way, with requirements for protection of other resources. This modification will provide for the continued safe operation of these coal leases and for compliance with the Mine Safety and Health Administration requirements” explained Forest Supervisor Charlie Richmond. “Because of timing requirements for construction, it is necessary for this decision to be made now, and not at a later time.”

Over the past five years the West Elk Mine, has extracted coal from the “B” seam of the mine. The Company plans to move into un-mined coal reserves within the “E” coal seam in the next few years.

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The FEIS for the Deer Creek Shaft and E-Seam drainage wells discloses the potential effects, mitigations, requirements and alternatives to manage the surface resources associated with these coal leases and the mining operations performed by the Mountain Coal Company (MCC). The Forest anticipates releasing future decision(s) based on the analysis documented in the FEIS to address MCC's proposed operations into the "E" coal seam and associated methane drainage wells and facilities.

Copies of the FEIS and Decision are available on the Forest's website at:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/gmug/policy/>.

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