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# ***NEWS***

## **BNI Coal receives reclamation and safety awards**

Center, North Dakota—BNI Coal received the North Dakota Award for Excellence in Surface Coal Mining and Reclamation from the Public Service Commission at the Annual Fall Meeting of the Lignite Energy Council.

BNI received the award for reclaiming an inert waste disposal facility at the Center Mine. The waste disposal facility was a mining pit that was permitted under mining regulations. It was mined in the late 1990s. After coal removal, BNI removed the acreage from the mining permit.

Minnkota Power then permitted the area as a waste disposal facility under the Department of Health. The disposal facility was designed to support 30 years of bottom ash production from the Milton R. Young Station. As new markets for bottom ash developed, Minnkota no longer needed the area for ash disposal.

To reclaim this area, BNI analyzed several different scenarios and determined that redisturbing and reshaping previously reclaimed land around the ash cell was the most cost-effective option. This option required significant permit revisions. These revisions laid out the plan for restripping previously mined areas around the ash cell and cutting out areas of spoil to fill the pit. BNI opened up 86 acres of previously reclaimed land surrounding the ash cell as a borrow area.

Approximately 10 feet of spoil material was removed from the area and used to help fill in the pit. The topography of the borrow area was then reshaped to blend the newly reclaimed area into the surrounding reclamation land.

All told, BNI removed eight stockpiles, most of which were 20 or more years old. Nearly 3 million cubic yards of spoil were required to fill the cell, which required BNI to move over 1 million cubic yards of soil a year beginning in 2015. After initial seeding, which will be done in the spring of 2018, BNI will be able to initiate the 10-year liability period on almost two sections of land that was being used for the ash cell, stockpiles, diversions and roads. The land will then be eligible for final bond release.

“This is a great example of the lignite industry going above and beyond regulatory requirements. By working together, and with multiple agencies, BNI and Minnkota have returned this land to a more productive use,” said Jay Volk, BNI environmental manager. “Our environmental and engineering departments did a great job working under the jurisdictions of two different state regulatory agencies during the permitting process. Our equipment operators and supervisors in the field have done an excellent job as well. At times, we had two excavators and six end-dump trucks hauling through this area, along with numerous dozers and motor graders. Their commitment to safety during this project has been fantastic, and we’re currently at 469 days and counting without a lost-time accident.”

The Center Mine also received a Distinguished Safety Award for 2016 from the LEC. Distinguished Safety Awards are awarded to lignite mines and power plants that have accident rates lower than the national average. BNI achieved a .063 accident rate in 2016.

*BNI Coal is a subsidiary of ALLETE, which is headquartered in Duluth, Minnesota.*

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