

Proposed Industrial Activity: Montem Resources' Tent Mountain Mine Redevelopment Project

I write to express numerous concerns with respect to the proposal. Additionally, I believe that the process used to acquire public feedback for industrial projects is unfair. It opens a short timeline for public participation (20 days just before Christmas), while the proponent has months to prepare submissions. The system is flawed, and the difficulties involved in the current process are more than enough to discourage most people from participating.

I participated in the Joint Panel Review Hearing for the Grassy Mountain proposal. The process was onerous and time consuming. I, worried, deeply concerned, threatened on multiple levels, felt forced to put my life on hold and focus on the issue for months.

It makes my heart cringe to think of having, again, to lose sleep, and devote time and energy to address the Tent Mountain proposal, and there are eight additional coal mining proposals that have yet to reach the review stage.

I would hope it has been aptly demonstrated at the Grassy Hearing, and through the wealth of evidence submitted to Alberta's Coal Policy Committee, that open pit mining in the Rocky Mountains of Alberta is not in the public interest.

Since the Grassy Mountain Hearing, I have read newspaper articles, attended seminars, and submitted comments to the Coal Policy Committee. I have learned a great deal about the Grassy Mountain mining project, and it is clear that its lauded benefits do not begin to outweigh the litany of negative impacts. There is evidence, too, and even a full study by a university professor, that the contribution of similar projects to the economy is nowhere near as large as proponents project. Her conclusion: The detrimental effects far outweigh the benefits, and surface coal mining projects are not in the public interest. Additionally, the existence of open pit mining in an area kills its tourism worth and destroys other economic development options.

Peace, tranquility and quality-of-life living tend to evaporate when the natural environment is compromised for industry. Ask the people in Elk Valley, BC who can no longer drink from their wells.

A wealth of material is available documenting the adverse impacts of surface coal mining on human health, water quality and quantity, rare or endangered flora and fauna, and valuable views. Because of this, I am not submitting supporting evidence. The facts speak for themselves. Only proponents of mining believe that these negative effects can be mitigated, or choose to accept them. Unfortunately, Alberta's history reveals projects have been approved, almost universally, and any conditions applied have not been monitored by the Government of Alberta, or if they were, that violations were invisible to the public. There is a long history of government inaction when conditions of operation are violated, or standards are not met. In other words, a project's stipulated conditions fail to ensure the health and safety of the populace and fail to ensure environmental protection.

What does society know about the impact of removing mountains to mine coal? What we do know is frightening. What we don't know would fill volumes. Monitoring by the Government of Alberta has been episodic or non-existent. Without defining data, we blindly approve industrial projects, hoping for the best. Water regimes in the thrust-faulted and fractured bedrock of this mountain landscape are infinitely complex. Albertans are only now discovering, thanks to former Government of Alberta employees who had been monitoring water courses draining operating coal mines and "supposedly reclaimed" surface mines, that there is far more contamination from these projects than originally thought, that aquatic and terrestrial environments were degraded, and that species as diverse as native trout and bighorn sheep have suffered as a result.

The big picture: It would appear the Alberta Government's de facto policy is, "If you don't know about it, it won't hurt you."

Bottom line: There appears to be a deliberate lack of effort in investigating and reporting the true impacts of coal mining.

Given the lack of rigorous oversight by the Government of Alberta, and the well-documented deleterious effects of surface coal mining, it is imperative that the federal government takes a lead role in the review of these projects.

I want to see water-focussed protection of Alberta's Eastern Slopes from destructive industrial and recreational abuses.

Alberta's Eastern Slopes and watershed values are vital to human, animal, plant and overall landscape health. Put simply, water is more important than coal.