



October 2, 2024

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Prairie and Northern Region
Impact Assessment Agency of Canada

Submitted by email: vistamine-minevista@iaac-aeic.gc.ca

Subject: NRCan Designation Request Response – Vista Coal Mine Phase II Expansion Project and Vista Underground Mine Project

On September 13, 2024, the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada (the Agency) requested that Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) complete a Federal Authority Advice Record, to support the designation request process for the Vista Coal Mine Phase II Expansion project.

NRCan is submitting this response pursuant to the amended *Impact Assessment Act* (IAA 2019) for a request to designate an activity. NRCan is participating in the designation request process of the (Project) as a subject matter expert providing expertise in manufacturing and storage of explosives, hydrogeology, geological hazards, mining economics, mining waste management and forestry.

NRCan has reviewed the Request for Designation of the Vista Coal Mine Phase II Expansion and Vista Underground Mine Project, submitted on August 7, 2024, by the Water Society and the West Athabasca Watershed Bioregional Society (together “Keepers”). NRCan’s responses are included in the attached Federal Authority Advice Record-Vista Coal Mine Phase II Expansion Project.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, I can be reached by email at Natalie.Robinson@nrca-nrcan.gc.ca.

Sincerely,

Natalie Robinson
Impact Assessment Officer,
Impact Assessment Division,
Office of the Chief Scientist

CC: Peter Unger, Director of Impact Assessment Division,
Christina Clarke, Team Lead Regional and Strategic Assessment

Attachment: Federal Authority Advice Record- Vista Coal Mine Phase II Expansion Project

ATTACHMENT

Federal Authority Advice Record: Designation Request under the IAA
Response due by October 1, 2024
 Vista Coal Mine Phase II Expansion Project (the Project)

Department/Agency	Natural Resource Canada (NRCan)
Lead Contact	Natalie Robinson
Full Address	580 Booth Street, Ottawa ON K1A 0Y7
Email	Natalie.Robinson@nrca-nrcan.gc.ca
Telephone	403-483-4587
Alternate Departmental Contact	Colter Kelly Colter.Kelly@nrca-nrcan.gc.ca (613) 859-5465

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- 1. Has your department or agency considered whether it has an interest in the Project; exercised a power or performed a duty or function under any Act of Parliament in relation to the Project; or taken any course of action (including provision of financial assistance) that would allow the Project to proceed in whole or in part?**

Specify as appropriate.

Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) has not taken any course of action, or exercised a power or performed a duty or function that would allow the Project to proceed.

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- 2. Is it probable that your department or agency may be required to exercise a power or perform a duty or function related to the Project to enable it to proceed?**

If yes, specify that power, duty or function and its legislative source.

It is not anticipated that NRCan will issue an authorization (explosives manufacturing or storage license) under the *Explosives Act* which would enable the Vista Coal Mine Phase II Project to proceed. Coalspur (the proponent), has an existing authorization for current operations, and the proposed Phase II expansion will not require a new explosives authorization.

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- 3. If your department or agency will exercise a power or perform a duty or function under any Act of Parliament in relation to the Project, will it involve public and Indigenous consultation?**

Specify as appropriate.

It is not anticipated that NRCan will be required to issue an authorization under the *Explosives Act*. Therefore, no public or Indigenous consultation is anticipated.

4. Is your department or agency in possession of specialist or expert information or knowledge that may be relevant to any potential adverse effects within federal jurisdiction caused by the Project or direct or incidental adverse effects stemming from the Project?

Specify as appropriate.

Socioeconomic Analysis of Mining

- Socioeconomic impacts of mining projects

Forestry

- Forest vegetation and links to biodiversity including species at risk habitat, such as Woodland Caribou (as required by Environment Canada and Climate Change)

Mining Waste

- Characterization of pit walls, excavated geological materials and ore processing waste required to determine the likelihood of metal and metalloid (including selenium) leaching and acidic drainage
- Development of source terms required to determine the contaminant loading of the surrounding aquatic ecosystem
- Assessment of the toxicity of metals and metalloids (including selenium) from contaminant presence in water and sediments
- Mine waste management practices, including mining effluent treatment

Geosciences

- Groundwater and physical hydrogeology (i.e., flow, recharge, and aquifer delineation)
 - Geological hazards
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5. Has your department or agency had previous contact or involvement with the Proponent or other parties in relation to the Project?

Provide an overview of the information or advice exchanged.

NRCan has not had previous contact or involvement with the proponent or other party in relation to the Project.

6. From the perspective of the mandate and area(s) of expertise of your department or agency, does the Project have the potential to cause adverse effects within federal jurisdiction or direct or incidental adverse effects as described in section 2 of the IAA? Could any of those effects be managed through legislative or regulatory mechanisms administered by your department or agency? If a licence, permit, authorization or approval may be issued, could it include conditions in relation to those effects?

Specify as appropriate.

Potential effects include:

Mine Waste

- The mine expansion increases the potential for the release of metal and metalloids, including selenium from the site and could result in increased contaminant loading on an already impacted ecosystem.

Geosciences

- Changes to groundwater flow have the potential to change groundwater-surface water interactions and consequently changes to fish and fish habitat and/or aquatic species.

Socio-economic analysis of Mining

- Given that there is a proposed federal bill to ban thermal coal exports from Canada in 2030, NRCan recommends that the proponent provides details of their plan with respect to aspects such as labour, remediation costs, investment recovery, etc.

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- 7. Does your department or agency have a program or additional authority that may be relevant and could be considered as a potential solution to concerns expressed about the Project? In particular, the following issues have been raised by the requestor:**
- potential impacts on species at risk and their habitats;
 - potential impacts on migratory birds;
 - potential impacts on fish and fish habitat;
 - potential impacts on the health, social and economic conditions of Indigenous Peoples;
 - potential impacts on Aboriginal and Treaty Rights;
 - potential impacts on Indigenous lands and resources used for traditional purposes;
 - potential impacts on surface water quality and quantity;
 - potential impacts to groundwater quality and quantity; and
 - potential impacts on air quality.

If yes, please specify the program or authority.

NRCan does not have any programs or additional authority that may be relevant and considered as a potential solution to concerns expressed about the Project.

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- 8. Does your department or agency have a program or mechanism that would address or mitigate impacts resulting from ammonia, nitrates, nitrites, sulphates, mercury and selenium contamination of water systems? If yes, please provide a brief explanation on the program, mechanism, including whether Indigenous consultation takes place.**

NRCan does not have a program or mechanism that would address or mitigate impacts resulting from the above ammonia, nitrates, nitrites, sulphates, mercury and selenium contamination of water systems.

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- 9. Does your department or agency have information about the interests of Indigenous groups in the vicinity of the Project; the exercise of their rights protected by section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*; and/or any consultation and accommodation undertaken, underway, or anticipated to address adverse impacts to the section 35 rights of the Indigenous groups?**

If yes, please specify.

NRCan does not have any information about the interests of Indigenous groups in the vicinity of the Project; the exercise of their rights protected by section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 and any consultation and accommodation undertaken, underway, or anticipated to address adverse impacts to the section 35 rights of the Indigenous groups.

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- 10. If your department has guidance material that would be helpful to the Proponent or to IAAC, please include these as attachments or hyperlinks in your response.**

NRCan does not have any guidance material.

Natalie Robinson

Name of departmental / agency responder

Senior Impact Assessment Officer

Title of responder

October 2, 2024

Date