

Mine site tiny compared to Jasper Park, Cheviot official says: 'Ludicrous' to say mine threat to park.

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BYLINE	Dennis Hryciuk

The proposed Cheviot coal mine will not damage Jasper National Park because the mine area is tiny compared to the park, says a Cheviot official.

"To suggest that our operation will have adverse effects on the park is ludicrous," said Bill Hume, general manager at Cardinal River Coals Ltd.

On Tuesday, Hume outlined some of the arguments his company will present at environmental hearings set to begin in Hinton today.

At an Edmonton press conference, he said the Cheviot open-pit mine will occupy land one-quarter of one per cent the size of the nearby national park -- 71 sq. km compared to Jasper's 11,400.

It's unreasonable to suggest, Hume told reporters, that the mine will harm the park and impact wildlife such as grizzly bears.

His comments came after a Parks Canada report warned the mine could threaten the environmental integrity of the park. The report notes the increased chances of grizzly bear deaths caused by the mine and other industrial activities in the region.

But Hume said grizzlies already pass

"We can help manage the problem," he said of the effects on grizzlies.

"Approval of Cheviot is needed to ensure the steady supply of metallurgical coal to our markets," he told reporters. "Without approval, we will lose our contracts and we will lose our jobs."

But environmentalists who dropped by the press conference said the size of the proposed mine must be considered along with other industrial activities in the region, such as forestry and oil and gas operations.

These "cumulative effects" of various industries were one aspect of Cheviot proposal ignored by the company and the federal-provincial environmental review panel during the first set of hearings three years ago, said activist Sam Gunsch.

Research shows that about seven per cent of Jasper National Park has suitable grizzly bear habitat—mainly in lower alpine regions and river valleys, said Gunsch, Edmonton spokesperson for the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society.

"The new mine would take out the remaining habitat that the bears need,"

through the area around the company's nearby Luscar mine. he said.

With an estimated population of 700 bighorn sheep, 100 deer and 80 elk, the area in and around Luscar is hunting ground for the grizzlies, Hume said.

But Hume believes environmentalists are simply trying to find any kind of argument that might scuttle the mine project.

"Environmental groups are throwing mud at the whole area and hoping that something sticks."

BACKGROUND

Following a successful court appeal by environmental groups, new hearings on the proposed \$250 million Cheviot open-pit coal mine are being held more than three years after original hearings were conducted.

As a result of the appeal, Federal Court struck down federal approval of the mine. The court ruled that a three-man panel that conducted the original hearings failed to conduct a proper review as required by the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act.

Among the inadequacies cited: an incomplete review of the cumulative environmental effects of the mine in combination with other possible industrial activities in the region near Jasper National Park and the failure to properly consider alternatives to the mine.

The proposed mine -- 23 km long and 3.5 km wide -- is to replace the nearby Luscar mine that employs 400 people and is running out of coal.
