

NEWS RELEASE

Wednesday, May 24, 2000

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Beyond Cheviot: Alberta Conservation Groups Announce New Campaign Focus

Edmonton - The coalition of local and national conservation organizations announced a new focus in their four-year campaign to stop the proposed Cheviot mine, on May 24, 2000. The new focus will be aimed at protecting the integrity of Jasper National Park and establishing a provincial Wildland Park encompassing the critical wildlife habitat of the Mountain Park area.

The coalition, consisting of the Alberta Wilderness Association, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Jasper Environmental Association and Pembina Institute, says new evidence presented in March and April to the Review Panel assessing Cheviot shows that the open-pit mine proposal should be abandoned for a more environmentally sustainable development strategy.

The AWA Coalition is asking that existing and imminent federal and provincial programs be used to help Hinton and area plan a more environmentally sustainable future. For example, the coalition believes the area should be a priority for the investment of the \$85 million the Panel on the Ecological Integrity of Canada's National Parks recommended be made available during the next five years for stewardship initiatives in the greater ecosystems of which the national parks are part. During the next few months, they plan to meet with community leaders and federal and provincial decision-makers to discuss implementation of the conservation recommendations presented by various participants in the hearing.

The coalition believes abandonment of the mine for an environmentally sustainable development plan has now become a necessity as the global coal markets make its development very unlikely. As well, cumulative effects information presented at the hearing shows the region's grizzly bears are headed for a crisis in lost habitat.

In addition, on May 2, the Federal Court issued an Order formally preventing the company from acting on the second of the two authorizations it had received for commencement of the mine development. The Order remains in effect until the Panel issues its supplemental report and federal Cabinet has made a decision on the new information and recommendations. The efforts of the AWA Coalition, working together with the Canadian Nature Federation and lawyers with the Sierra Legal Defence Fund, resulted in a successful lawsuit against the first federal approval for the mine that brought about the supplemental hearing.

"The cumulative harm of industrial activity in the region and the proposed Cheviot mine added to this are a prime example of what the Integrity Report is sounding the alarm about," said Dianne Pachal, conservation manager for the Alberta Wilderness Association. "Albertans have a real opportunity to turn things around and the Cheviot hearing has given us the information to act on."

"Grande Cache is already facing a future without a coal mine head on by exploring their natural amenity options, such as tourism and encouraging retirees to move to the area for its mountain scenery, clean air and water, and wilderness next door."

Ben Gadd, naturalist and author of the *Handbook for the Canadian Rockies*, presented a slide-show in Edmonton, giving the public a first-hand look at the focus of the new campaign. Recommendations of the

ecological integrity panel have been endorsed by Heritage Minister Sheila Copps and will play a significant role in the Coalition's campaign.

The Review Panel heard three new sets of key evidence and recommendations about the mine's ecological impact, economics, and health risks. Parks Canada identified the western third of the proposed mine as prime grizzly bear habitat that should be maintained along with three other areas in the region.

Parks Canada's very direct final presentation warned that the mine threatens the integrity of Jasper National Park and its wildlife, indicating the new information made the department even more concerned about this threat than at the hearings in February 1998.

New economic analysis revealed it is highly unlikely the mine will be built given the declining current and future markets for the Cheviot type of coal and the cost of the mine. With respect to Alberta's economy, the option of leaving the wildland undisturbed is of comparable value to the option of proceeding with the mine.

Finally, the mine would 'open a Pandora's box' of risks to human and environmental health. Mining in the same geological formation downstream at Luscar has caused selenium levels to exceed safety guidelines in streams and the man-made lake, and in fish for human consumption. A consumption advisory was issued by Alberta Health in February.

The Review Panel's second report is pending, with such reports usually issued within three months of the close of the public hearings. The first review failed to address the cumulative impacts on critical wildlife habitat and endangered species of the proposed mine in combination with logging, oil and gas, and other mines in the region.

At Luscar's May 11 annual meeting, President and CEO Gordon Ulrich told shareholders that the company's decision on proceeding with the Cheviot Mine will depend entirely on the international market.

"Issuing an approval for the mine with the hope that the mine will not happen anyhow is still a bad scenario for the region," said Sam Gunsch of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. "As long as a permit for a mine remains there, it will be a road-block to better protection for wildlife, Jasper and an enlarged provincial park, just as the present coal lease held back consideration of the area under Alberta's Special Places 2000 program for park establishment."