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CONSERVATION BEST ECONOMIC OPTION IN CARDINAL DIVIDE–CHEVIOT MINE AREA

Calgary-based Fording Canadian Coal Trust is closing its Luscar mine near Hinton and putting its Cheviot project on hold indefinitely due to poor market conditions for coal. These follow the closing of Luscar's Obed mine last week and the Gregg River mine in 2000. This leaves a window of opportunity to seriously examine more sustainable economic alternatives based on conservation of the ecological values of the area.

AWA has maintained for years that a much better alternative to building a mine at Cheviot is to protect the area for its wilderness values and long-term, sustainable economic potential. An Alberta Government study found that the economic potential of protected landscapes is comparable to that of the forestry and agriculture industries and can provide as many jobs as resource extraction industries. As well, healthy wilderness areas provide services, like water purification, that would be very expensive to reproduce.

"The economic advantages of protecting wilderness are truly sustainable. The future of Hinton's economy requires smart decisions which involve ecosystem protection," said Cliff Wallis, AWA president. "Now that the Cheviot mine has been put on indefinite hold, the Cardinal Divide area should be protected immediately, not only for its immense wilderness value, but also to protect the economic future of the area."

In an economy that's uncertain at best, coal is becoming a risky strategy because alternatives are often cheaper and definitely cleaner. Coal is not a stable economic venture. And it's not just the economy at stake. The environmental impact of coal mining is huge, particularly in sensitive and internationally important ecosystems like the Cardinal Divide.

"AWA doesn't want to see any community go into economic ruin. We have to get away from the resource extraction mentality we have in Alberta. That will only lead to economic ruin in the long run," said Tamaini Snaith, AWA conservation biologist. "People want to live in communities that have a beautiful environment and a stable economy. Economic success up and down the Eastern Slopes is becoming diversified and no longer relies on single industry extractive resources."

