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Government Dodges Caw Ridge Inquiry

In August, AWA called upon the provincial government to hold an inquiry into the public interests surrounding Caw Ridge, located northwest of Grande Cache, Alberta. The ridge offers exceptional wildlife habitat, including for bighorn sheep, mountain goats, and grizzly bears. It also lies across the traditional migratory path of the Redrock–Prairie Creek caribou herd. Unfortunately, Caw Ridge is also valued for its coal reserves. Grande Cache Coal Corporation, which holds the coal lease for the area, has consistently identified Caw Ridge in its long-range plan for mining. This past summer, the company commenced an exploratory drilling program for its No. 16 Mine, which includes Caw Ridge.

This provided the impetus for AWA to write to the Premier asking that he reactivate an inquiry process initiated in 1999 by the Energy Resources Conservation Board. We received a response not from the Premier's office, but from Sustainable Resource Development Minister Ted Morton. While not directly denying our request, he wrote that the corporation has obtained the right to coal in the area and that the government did a review of coal development in the Caw Ridge area in 2005. AWA will be responding to Minister Morton's letter to find out more about this review, which did not allow for input from the public.

Further, in September, Grande Cache Coal applied for a permit extension to reopen the No. 12 Mine, east of Caw Ridge, which was previously mined by predecessor Smoky River Coal Ltd. and was left unreclaimed when the company went bankrupt.

AWA has submitted a statement of concern regarding the application. In our statement, we asked the government to ensure that the application and reclamation plan meet the necessary current standards. If the mine is approved, an adequate reclamation fund must be secured to guarantee that the mine be fully reclaimed so as not to repeat the situation when Smoky River Coal left the people of Alberta with the reclamation liability.

– *Chris Wearmouth*

