

Kananaskis Country Receives Temporary Reprieve from Sour Gas Development

Though Suncor Energy received Energy Resource Conservation Board (ERCB) approval in 2010 to go ahead with its planned Sullivan development in southern Kananaskis Country, the company appears not to have any plans to begin construction any time soon.

ERCB's June 2010 *Decision 2010-022* approved the plans to drill 11 sour gas wells and build 37 km of pipeline across a swathe of relatively pristine Kananaskis land. This came despite considerable objections from local First Nations and ranchers and in fact the decision is currently facing a legal challenge from the Stoney Indian Band based on the question "Did the Board err in law by failing to characterize the Eden Valley Reserve as an urban centre?" Setback requirements are considerably less stringent for communities not defined as urban centres.

AWA's opposition cited the potential effects of the development on wildlife, including grizzlies and cutthroat trout. Although ERCB agreed that "Given Petro-Canada's analysis that indicated effects on mortality will be large in magnitude, long term, and regional in extent, it appears that there is potential for the Project to contribute significantly to grizzly bear mortality," they still issued an approval.

In theory, the company could still go ahead with the work, despite the ongoing legal challenge. But Suncor seem less keen on the development than their predecessor Petro-Canada, who filed the original application. Gas prices are also not as high as they were when the project was originally planned several years ago. But only time will tell how long this temporary reprieve for southern Kananaskis Country will last.

- Nigel Douglas