
Grassy Mountain Coal Project Under Review

A joint provincial-federal panel has started its review of a proposed coal mine in the Crowsnest Pass. Benga Mining Limited, a subsidiary of the Australian company Riversdale Resources, has proposed to develop and operate an open-pit metallurgical coal mine approximately seven kilometres north of Blairmore in the Crowsnest Pass. The project footprint will span 2,800 hectares (28 square kilometres) and operations are expected to last 24 years with a production capacity of 4.5 million tonnes a year.

This proposed project officially surfaced in March 2015. In January 2016, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency determined that the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) produced by Riversdale Resources did not satisfy all requirements of the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* (2012). Accordingly, it required the company to respond to a number of information requests. On January 25, 2016 the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) informed Riversdale Resources that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was incomplete. These two rulings put a halt on the review process until deficiencies were addressed. As of November 2018, Benga has submitted its eighth (!) addendum to its

Environmental Impact Assessment in order to address these deficiencies.

With perceived deficiencies now deemed sufficiently addressed, a joint provincial-federal review panel has been established, consisting of Alex Bolton (chief hearing commissioner with the Alberta Energy Regulator), Hans Matthews (President of the Canadian Aboriginal Minerals Association) and Dean O’Gorman (hearing commissioner with the Alberta Energy Regulator).

The Joint Review Panel has now begun a public comment period that will run until January 21, 2019 on “the sufficiency and technical merit of the information” available on the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency’s website. Indigenous groups, government agencies, and the public also are invited to make recommendations to the Joint Review Panel about any additional information the Panel should have before it holds a public hearing.

AWA has had long standing concerns with the proposed project’s potential to disrupt the local ecosystem; neighbouring creeks are federally protected critical habitat for threatened westslope cutthroat trout under the *Species at Risk Act*. If the Grassy Mountain mine is developed, these populations are at serious risk of further harm from potential sources of selenium and sediment as

well as further habitat degradation.

In addition, AWA is concerned that approving Grassy Mountain would open “Pandora’s Box” – more mines in the Pass could be proposed. Postmedia’s Amanda Stephenson pointed to Atrium Coal Ltd.’s interest in developing a 22,000-hectare coal mine adjacent to Grassy Mountain if Riversdale is successful. She quoted Atrium CEO Max Wang as saying: “There are quite a number of global investors, mostly from Australia, interested in that region...but they are very much looking to the success of Grassy Mountain.”

This may cripple any progress made to reduce cumulative effects under the recently released Livingstone-Porcupine Land Footprint Management Plan. Indeed, one questions whether these coal projects will be compatible with the Biodiversity Management Framework, now slated to be released in 2019, which will place limits on spatial human footprint (cutblocks, mines, etc.) in the region.

AWA will continue to follow the review process as it unfolds in the coming year and we hope the panel will agree that the home of threatened fish is no place for a coal mine.

- Joanna Skrajny