

that “the Minister decided that the Project does not warrant a federal environmental assessment.

In early March 2020, AWA filed a Statement of Concern (SOC) with the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) regarding Coalspur Mines (Operations) Ltd. application to divert water out of the McLeod River. AWA believes diverting for development operations will have harmful ecological impacts to both aquatic and terrestrial communities.

Coalspur’s legal counsel replied to AWA’s SOC in early May, a response required by AER within a given timeline. Coalspur’s letter to AWA stated that “AWA has not demonstrated that it is directly and adversely affected by the Project.” Accordingly, it requested “...that the AER disregard the SOC filed by AWA and proceed with the timely processing of its Application.”

Despite the results, AWA continues to monitor both coal mining exploration and development applications submitted to the AER. This monitoring becomes even more prudent since the provincial government rescinded the Coal Policy (1976). AWA firmly believes that the Coal Policy, a policy the government calls “outdated,” is vital to protecting sensitive mountain and foothills landscapes. Without that policy we are left with zoning gaps that result from a regulatory process that employs a case-by-case approval approach. The provincial government believes that our current regulatory system, alongside land-use planning, is robust enough to protect sensitive landscapes throughout the eastern slopes, while promoting the increased expansion of coal mining activities. The truth of the matter is that Alberta currently has no cumulative effects framework or thresholds in place to foresee and manage effectively the impacts of land-use activities on wildlife and waters. Nor do we have finalized, binding, land-use plans for most of the Eastern Slopes.

Furthermore, AWA believes this policy change ignores the value of consulting Albertans about how their public lands should be managed. It betrays the idea that Alberta’s public lands should be managed in a sustainable manner that benefits all Albertans.

- Nissa Petterson

Coalspur Vista Coal Mine Phase II

Last May, AWA in conjunction with Fraser Thomson of Ecojustice, wrote Environment and Climate Change Canada Minister McKenna requesting an environmental assessment of Coalspur’s Vista Coal Mine Phase II. Located near Hinton, AWA cited adverse ecological impacts from the overall expansion of the Coalspur mine, with particular emphasis on the expansion’s proximity to McPherson Creek.

As part of the McLeod River watershed, McPherson creek supports populations of endangered Athabasca Rainbow Trout and threatened bull trout. It also provides an important wildlife corridor and has been identified as an integral part of traditional ecological knowledge for local Indigenous Peoples.

In December 2019, AWA was notified by the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada