

*January 29, 2021*

Dear AWA Supporter,

These early weeks in January seem to have flown by. While we have been working on a number of important areas, this newsletter is about coal – specifically mountain top removal coal mining (aka open pit strip mining) on our Eastern Slopes. There are many pieces to the story and much work is being done. We hope this newsletter will give you a hint of what those key pieces are and where to find more information.

Finally, at the end of this newsletter, we've included Lorne Fitch's inspiring article '*Coal Dust in Their Veins*' (it appeared in the January 27, 2021 *Lethbridge Herald*).

With my best wishes for your good health in these pandemic times and many happy days in 2021!

Christyann, for your AWA Team!

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### *Albertans Are Concerned About Coal Strip Mining*



The number of municipalities speaking out against the plans to strip mine in critical wildlife zones of the Eastern Slopes grows every day: Lethbridge, Pincher Creek, High River, Edson, Longview and Nanton are the concerned communities we are so far aware of (if there are others, please let us know).

Early next week City of Calgary Council is scheduled to debate lending support to the municipalities that oppose the decision to rescind the 1976 Coal Policy. Your elected municipal leaders need to hear from you so they know you want

them to speak up and defend our Eastern Slopes from development. Are your elected municipal representatives going to consider this issue? Have they considered this issue? **Take a moment and give your mayor or councillor a call or email to say it is time to protect our headwaters.** No matter where you live, now is the time to speak up to protect the wilderness and landscapes that are vital to wildlife, water security and recreation.

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## *Coal Policy Rescinded*

Last week, we were in virtual court with our colleagues, lawyers and others deeply concerned with the Alberta Government's decision to rescind the 1976 *Coal Policy*. Can the courts review the decision the provincial government made in 2020 to rescind the Coal Policy? If so, can interested parties like AWA intervene when the case proceeds?



A major foundation of the application for judicial review is that the government had a duty to consult with people affected by the decision. The government didn't do that (well, they did consult with the coal industry). Justice Neufeld of the Court of Queen's Bench won't be rushed to judgment on the merit of this application and he told all parties he would make a decision in the "next couple of months."

AWA chairs a *Coal Policy Working Group* that includes ranchers, landowners, colleagues from CAPE, XR, CPAWS, CPWG: Council of Canadians, Y2Y, ACTWS, BHA and a number of individuals. The group held a Day of Action on October 27, 2020, the first day of the Grassy Mountain Coal Mine Proposal Joint Review Panel hearings. Between now and the end of April, the Coal Policy Working Group will host a series of Town Hall Meetings featuring expert panels. Topics include the ecological and human health impacts of coal, the economics of mining in the Crowsnest Pass, and perspectives and experiences. Watch our newsletters for details and if you would like to be part of the group please contact Nissa Petterson, AWA Conservation Specialist: [npetterson@abwild.ca](mailto:npetterson@abwild.ca).

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## *Grassy Mountain Blog*



During the Grassy Mountain Mine Hearings, Ian Urquhart, AWA Conservation Director wrote several blog posts that provide an in-depth look at some of the issues and evidence presented at the hearings. Although the hearing has concluded he intends to add material to what is so far there.

Here is the link: [Grassy Mountain Blog - Alberta Wilderness Association](#).

We have a separate newsletter list for those who wrote, engaged, and are concerned about what comes next in the Grassy Mountain decision making process. If you would like to be added to that newsletter list please write to [awa@abwild.ca](mailto:awa@abwild.ca) and let us know.

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## *Looking for More Resources and Details?*

Please check out our website for resources including a copy of the 1976 Coal Policy, a Briefing Note on Defending our Eastern Slopes, maps with coal leases and more: [Coal - Alberta Wilderness Association](#)

AWA has contributed to a variety of media outlets on the coal issue in the last six weeks. Here are links to some of those contributions:

- Danielle Smith radio show, January 15, 2021: Ian Urquhart appeared on the Danielle Smith show along with High River Mayor Craig Snodgrass, Minister Jason Nixon, musician Corb Lund, and former Alberta Assistant Deputy Minister David Luff.  
<https://omny.fm/shows/danielle-smith/backlash-to-proposed-coal-mining-in-the-rockies>
- CBC's Alberta at Noon with Judy Aldous, January 19, 2021: Ian Urquhart appeared with Municipal District of Crowsnest Pass Councillor Lisa Sygutek to discuss coal mining.  
<https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-1-alberta-at-noon/clip/15819621->

- Bob Weber, “Morally and ethically wrong:’ Court to hear challenge to Alberta coal policy removal,” *Toronto Star*, January 17, 2021.  
<https://www.thestar.com/politics/2021/01/17/morally-and-ethically-wrong-court-to-hear-challenge-to-alberta-coal-policy-removal.html>

### *Coal Dust Was In Their Veins, Lorne Fitch, P. Biol.*

My uncle was an underground miner who worked for decades in Crowsnest Pass coal mines. He was a tough, stocky man, accustomed to hard work and an unforgiving life. As he was dying in the Pincher Creek hospital, a nurse tried to wash his hands, blackened by a lifetime of exposure to coal dust. He endured the scrubbing for a while and finally bluntly told the nurse “the coal’s not on me, it’s in me”. Indeed, coal dust was imbedded in his skin.

One might speculate what my uncle’s lungs resembled, if his hands were so impregnated with coal dust. His other health issues were not as evident but were a legacy of coal mining.

My uncle took mining jobs at Drumheller and later the Crowsnest Pass. I doubt if he would have called himself prosperous, other than owning a small miner’s cottage and later in life, the occasional new car, polished and immaculately maintained.

My aunt and her family emigrated from northern Italy, to work in coal mines on the BC side of the Crowsnest Pass. Despite the multiple booms and busts, minimal safety standards and being unable to hang her laundry outside except for Sundays for the coal dust, she remained fatalistically optimistic about new mine openings.

Without alternatives my uncle and aunt were trapped in the spiral of unsustainable and ephemeral promises of coal. They breathed coal, literally and figuratively—they were perhaps unable to assess the reality of their situation and envision another future.

My uncle was an angler and a hunter, both pursuits that tune ones’ observational powers. If my uncle and others were concerned about the changes to the landscape, the eroding coal spoil piles, the dust, despoiled rivers and streams, they said nothing.

I can’t fault my uncle’s silence. As Upton Sinclair observed, “It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends on his not understanding it.”

Coal mining has costs and they occur at multiple levels. We can’t, or shouldn’t, remain blind to this reality. When we get beyond the boosterism and hype to do a proper accounting it becomes clear the costs outweigh the benefits. Repeatedly,

taxpayers bear the costs, especially the ecological ones, and corporations escape with the benefits while a dumbfounded set of politicians won't admit to being suckered.

Ironically, it is the mine workers who also end up cheated, led on by the boosters, lured into jobs that may not last and often suffering health related illnesses that could rob them of a long life.

Maybe my uncle didn't sense he had a choice. We do, and it doesn't involve digging huge holes in the Eastern Slopes.

My uncle's silence on the costs and inevitability of coal mining fortunately doesn't have to pass to us. That was then. In light of history and better information we can be smart enough to not get sucked into a vortex of economic hype, unrealistic promises and destroyed landscapes. We need to pause, and ask our politicians to pause and consider carefully the costs and consequences of trying to resurrect a coal mining economy which liquidates one asset at the expense of so many others. This is not an issue to be complacent about.

Recent evaluations of three BC metallurgical coal mines found the company's rosy projections for jobs, royalty payments and economic benefits were vastly overstated. Given these circumstances, why the Alberta government is promoting new coal mine development is a mystery.

A long legacy of environmental failures in all phases of coal development— exploration, mining and reclamation— especially in mountain and foothill landscapes should make even the most optimistic of us question if it is ever technically feasible to mine coal and protect other values.

It would be instructive and should be mandatory, for our government to conduct a comprehensive survey of all mines in Alberta to capture what was said in initial impact assessments, versus what actually happened, as a guide for future decisions on coal development. The bright light of truth would be a good antidote to the impulse to fall, once more, for a new litany of unrealistic and empty promises.

It appears the UCP government has coal clogging their veins and brains. If we are to proceed with the fantasy of coal as our economic salvation, all coal development proposals should be vetted through joint federal/provincial hearings as an essential curb on current political short-sightedness and economic myopia.

As citizens with a social and ecological conscience we would do well to express, forcefully, to politicians seemingly in the pocket of foreign companies a singular truth— we've seen enough now to know that our economic salvation doesn't lie with blasting the tops off mountains, burying valleys (and native trout) in overburden, turning our drinking water toxic and contributing to the same human health issues that killed my uncle.

For such truth is, now so clearly, self-evident.

*Lorne Fitch is a Professional Biologist, a retired provincial Fish and Wildlife Biologist and a former Adjunct professor with the University of Calgary.*

## *Show You Want Our Eastern Slopes Protected*

There are a number of groups that you can contact for signs and banners:



AWA Posters, Icons for your email, or any other idea to show your concern -- five versions are available for free PDF download: [Coal - Alberta Wilderness Association](#)



Banners by Ranchers 4'x12' - available for purchase \$140. Email [tylerandrachel@trailsendbeeef.com](mailto:tylerandrachel@trailsendbeeef.com)



Protect the Oldman -- available from Albertans for a coal free southwest ([ab4coalfreesw.ca](http://ab4coalfreesw.ca))



Dedicated to the conservation of wilderness and completion of a protected areas network, AWA inspires communities to care for Alberta's wild spaces through awareness and action.

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