

The Promise and the Ambiguity in Reinstating the 1976 Coal Policy

February 8, 2021



Few governments and politicians are willing to admit their mistakes. So it was good today to hear Energy Minister Savage say it's important for a responsible government to "admit when you've made a mistake and to fix it. And that's what we are doing here today." AWA thanks Minister Savage for taking the podium to admit her government's mistake in rescinding the 1976 Coal Policy and to declare that "Alberta's government will reinstate the full 1976 Coal Policy."

"The Minister's decision offers some encouragement to believe this may be a good day for Alberta's lands and waters and for the tens of thousands of Albertans who have opposed that June 2020 decision," said Ian Urquhart, AWA Conservation Director.

But, some of the Minister's comments need clarification. Minister Savage said she directed the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) to prohibit mountaintop removal mining. In her news conference the Minister said, with respect to mountain top and open pit coal mining along the Eastern Slopes: "Let me be

clear, this will not happen in Alberta.”

AWA wonders what this means for mountain top removal projects that would occur on Category 4 lands, lands unprotected from coal mining by the 1976 policy. “Will Montem Resources’ proposed Chinook project in the Crowsnest Pass,” wondered Urquhart, “be prohibited from applying for AER approval since it is a mountain top mine? Is mountain top removal mining now prohibited on all lands in Alberta, regardless of Category?”

And what does the Minister’s directive about “no mountaintop removal will be permitted” mean for possible projects like Aries and Blackstone west of Rocky Mountain House. Are those open-pit, strip mines classified as “mountaintop removal?”

Furthermore, as was the case for Category 2 lands under the Coal Policy, will Minister Savage entertain requests from coal mining companies for an exemption from that policy? Such an exemption would allow a company to apply to the AER for permission to develop leased Category 2 lands. “Minister Savage should make clear,” said Urquhart, “that she will not allow any exemptions to the Coal Policy’s de facto Category 2 Lands prohibitions.”

Further to AWA’s news release of earlier today, AWA was encouraged to see Minister Savage promise to consult with Albertans about coal mining in Alberta. But, what form will that consultation take? AWA reiterates what we said earlier today – consultation should take place through a review panel of independent experts who will hold public hearings as part of their review. The government must not implement a consultation process designed to lead Albertans to the government’s preferred conclusion.

AWA hopes Minister Savage will accept the following recommendations:

- instruct the AER to halt immediately the issuing of coal exploration permits along Alberta’s Eastern Slopes (pursuant to section 67 of Alberta’s *Responsible Energy Development Act*).
- instruct the AER to issue a directive saying that, until further notice, no coal mining applications in Alberta’s Rockies and Foothills will be considered by the Regulator (pursuant to section 67 of Alberta’s *Responsible Energy Development Act*).
- establish an independent expert review panel on the Future of Alberta’s Rockies and Headwaters to study and recommend what industrial activities should be allowed to apply for permission to operate in Alberta’s

Rockies and Foothills. Public hearings throughout Alberta should be part of that Review Panel's mandate.

- impose a moratorium on all coal development in Alberta's Rockies and Foothills until the Review Panel completes its investigations and the government responds to the Commission's recommendations with legislation.

"Tens of thousands of Albertans called on the Kenney government to reinstate the Coal Policy," said Urquhart. "The Minister's news conference offers some hope that the government will take the consultative, legislative, and regulatory measures needed to respond meaningfully to what Albertans have said about a landscape that sits near the heart of the province's identity."

For more information:

Dr. Ian Urquhart
AWA Conservation Director
iurquhart@abwild.ca
780-937-4692



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.

[Donate](#)

Copyright © 2021 Alberta Wilderness Association, All rights reserved.

Want to change how you receive these emails?
You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).