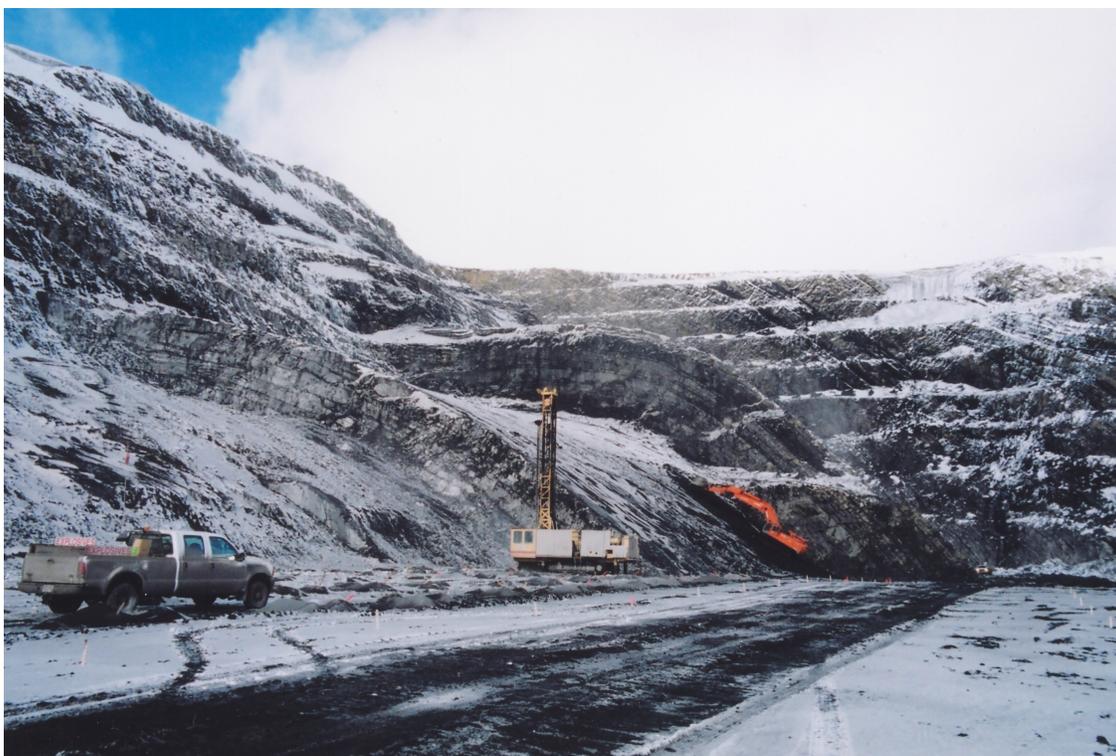


The Eastern Slopes Six Coal Projects Must Be "Paused Indefinitely"

March 5, 2021



Aries, Blackstone, Cabin Ridge, Chinook, Elan South, and Isolation South... Energy Minister Sonya Savage's office has confirmed these are the six coal projects in the Eastern Slopes the Minister alluded to in her February 8th news conference. These potential coal mines cover 650 square kilometres (65,000 hectares) in the headwaters of the Oldman, Crowsnest, and Clearwater Rivers. This "footprint" is more than three times as large as Teck Resources' existing footprint in B.C.'s Elk Valley. If allowed to proceed, these projects will take a tremendous bite out of an iconic Alberta landscape.

Most significantly, neither the Minister's February remarks nor her accompanying directive to the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) prohibits any of these projects from moving forward. Any or all of them may apply to the AER for approval.

Last month the Minister said: "All future coal development and coal lease sales

on Category 2 lands is to be paused indefinitely pending consultations on a new modern coal policy.” Minister Savage then went on to say that, on those Category 2 lands, “(t)here are six projects that are being explored for potential development.”

On February 12th, AWA asked the government two questions: please identify the six unidentified “potential development” projects and please clarify if those six projects constituted “future coal development” and, as such, are prohibited from moving ahead.

On March 1st the government responded. It named the six projects but did not commit to forcing these projects to respect the indefinite pause ordered for future coal development on Category 2 lands. Instead the government wrote:

All six projects are exploration projects. Any future applications for coal development are subject to regulatory review by the AER (and federal government if necessary) under applicable statutes.

There is no exemption mechanism under the coal policy. A company is able to submit an application to the AER regardless of where a project is located. The AER or joint review panel takes existing laws and policies into consideration when reviewing a project application.

Furthermore, the government has not ordered these companies to stop their previously-authorized drilling and road construction activities. AER-approved coal exploration programs for Cabin Ridge, Elan, Montem Resources, and Valory Resources will allow these companies to invade the Eastern Slopes until 2022.

“How can the government deliver a meaningful public consultation on whether coal mining should be allowed along the Eastern Slopes when it allows these activities to continue, when it is prepared to allow these six projects to proceed?” asks Ian Urquhart, AWA’s Conservation Director. “How can the government tell the tens of thousands of Albertans who have said categorically “no to coal” they will be consulted meaningfully when the Minister of Energy seems content to allow up to three Elk Valleys worth of strip mining to seek regulatory approval along the Eastern Slopes?”

Under Section 67(1)(b) of the *Responsible Energy Development Act* the Minister of Energy has the power to give directions to the AER for the purposes of “ensuring the work of the Regulator is consistent with the programs, policies

and work of the Government in respect of energy resource development, public land management, environmental management and water management.” (my emphasis) “Allowing these activities and projects to continue is inconsistent with the Minister’s declaration that Albertans will be consulted about ‘a new modern coal policy’,” Urquhart said, “unless the government already has decided that its public consultation won’t affect the status of the eight projects that have been designed to strip mine coal in Alberta’s Rockies and Foothills.” (adding the Grassy Mountain and Tent Mountain projects pushes the total number of projects to eight)

To increase the public’s trust in a forthcoming public consultation about coal mining along Eastern Slopes, the Energy Minister must:

- use her authority under the *Responsible Energy Development Act* to direct the AER to suspend all coal exploration activities in Category 2, 3, and 4 lands until her “new modern coal policy” consultations are completed.
- use her legislative authority to pause the development of any of the six projects identified above, plus the Tent Mountain project, until a new coal policy is enshrined in legislation.
- appoint an independent panel of third-party experts to consider if coal mining should have a future anywhere in Alberta’s Rockies and Foothills. To that end this independent panel must hold public hearings throughout Alberta.

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