

AWA Calls for a Federal Impact Assessment of the Tent Mountain Coal Mine Project

April 2, 2021



CANADA

CONSOLIDATION

CODIFICATION

Impact Assessment Act

Loi sur l'évaluation d'impact

S.C. 2019, c. 28, s. 1

L.C. 2019, ch. 28, art. 1

Dear Members of AWA's Grassy Mountain group:

Spring is here...and if your email/letter-writing skills have been hibernating here's an invitation to practice them again – the Tent Mountain Coal Mine Project. What does AWA hope you will do? Write or email Environment and Climate Change Canada Minister Wilkinson and add your voice to the requests from AWA, First Nations and, soon...other conservation groups, that the Minister order a federal impact assessment of the Tent Mountain project. I'll offer some links/suggestions about crafting a request at the end of this note. First though, I want to make the case for why Tent Mountain is so important and worth your time.

Background

First, Tent Mountain is a proposal from Montem Resources, a financially-struggling penny stock on the Australian Securities Exchange. Montem reported zero dollars in revenue in 2020 and recorded a loss of AUD \$3.41

million in 2020. It's a penny stock, closing this week at 15.5 cents per share.

Montem wants to start mining again at Tent Mountain. Tent Mountain was the last operating mine in the Crowsnest and closed in 1980. Norcen Energy Resources Ltd., the owner of Coleman Collieries that operated Tent Mountain, said in 1980 that the mines would be closed because of "high operating costs and low-quality coal reserves."

Its leases cover approximately 1,900 hectares (19 square kilometres) and the mine would be wedged south of Hwy 3 and between the B.C. border and the Castle Wildland Provincial Park.

Montem's plans would see Tent Mountain produce 4,925 tonnes of metallurgical coal per day. This is a mere 75 tonnes shy of the 5,000 tonnes per day threshold that would automatically classify Tent Mountain as a designated project in the federal impact assessment process. Put differently, this 75 tonnes represents less than one-quarter of one load of what one mining truck such as Caterpillar's 797B would deliver to the coal processing plant. The distinction between a 4,925 tonnes per day mine and a 5,000 tonnes per day mine is one without a difference.

Why is it Imperative to Request a Federal Assessment?

I think there are several reasons. Here are the ones that stand out for me. Montem has publicly stated that their project is the first of five they want to impose on our Rockies/Foothills. They hope Tent Mountain will generate enough cash for Montem to proceed with their much larger Chinook project. Nearly 10,000 hectares of leases are linked to the Chinook project. If Chinook proceeds, Montem has its eyes set on three other projects: Isola, Oldman, and 4-Stack. Together these three projects would exploit another 8,000 hectares along the Eastern Slopes.

Stop Tent Mountain and I believe we plant a kiss of death on these other ambitions (nearly 200 square kilometres of land are leased to Montem for all five projects).

Another reason why a federal impact assessment is imperative is because the provincial process is clearly biased in favour of industries proposing to exploit natural resources. Frankly, the provincial assessment/regulatory process is bankrupt when it comes to representing the public interest and to allowing concerned citizens to participate in decision-making. There is nothing in the

histories of the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) and, before it, the Energy Resources Conservation Board that seriously challenges this conclusion. As law professor Shaun Fluker pointedly concluded: “the Alberta government and the Regulator see little value in public participation concerning energy project decision-making and have little regard for participation even by landowners who may be directly affected by a project.” We have no reason to believe the AER will abandon its historical stance. To the contrary, one of the purposes of the federal *Impact Assessment Act* is “to ensure that opportunities are provided for meaningful public participation during an impact assessment.” The federal legislation has a more generous, a more democratic, view of public participation.

Third, the federal government should demand a federal assessment of projects affecting areas of federal jurisdiction. There is no doubt that Tent Mountain engages these areas of federal jurisdiction. For example, federally designated species at risk – grizzly bear, westslope cutthroat trout, whitebark pine – all face potential adverse effects from this project and Montem’s planned future projects.

Fourth, Tent Mountain and the cumulative effects it will encourage and contribute to may change the environment in ways affecting the Indigenous peoples of Canada.

Fifth, one of the aspects of Tent Mountain that make it especially important for an assessment from our national government rests in its potential transboundary impacts. It will affect a regional grizzly bear population; part of its infrastructure will be located in B.C.; pollution from this mine has the potential to cause adverse effects to the South Saskatchewan River, making it - of serious concern to the people of Saskatchewan. Also, there is an important transboundary dimension with respect to Indigenous peoples. The Grassy Mountain hearing allowed the Ktunaxa and Shuswap Indian Band, First Nations residing in the lands we call B.C., to express their concerns about what that mine would mean for portions of their traditional territories. They will have no place in a provincial environmental assessment.

Finally, the following quote about the recommendation the Impact Assessment Agency is preparing for Minister Wilkinson makes it especially important for individuals to contribute designation requests: “The recommendation would consider whether the carrying out of the project may cause adverse effects within federal jurisdiction or adverse direct or incidental effects, and public

concerns related to such effects.” (my emphasis)

Designation requests represent another medium we can use to show the Minister just how concerned the public is about the prospect of coal mining along Alberta’s Eastern Slopes.

What to Write and When to Write It

Let’s first address “when to write it.” Now...as soon as possible. The first designation request was made on March 2, 2021. The Minister has 90 days to respond to that request. This means he has until May 31, 2021.

But, he will need time to consider the recommendation he will receive from the Impact Assessment Agency. The Agency is not going to submit its analysis/recommendation to Minister Wilkinson on May 30th. I would guess the Minister will want at least two weeks, maybe a month, to consider the Agency’s recommendation. This means the Agency’s analysis may land on his desk in early May.

For this reason I would urge you to submit a designation request email to the Minister by April 23rd – that’s just three weeks from today.

Your letter should be emailed to:

- The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, ec.ministre-minister.ec@canada.ca
- The Impact Assessment Agency, ceaa.information.acee@canada.ca
- The Edmonton office of the Agency, iaac.pnr-rpn.aeic@canada.ca

With respect to the letter’s content, Heather McPherson, MP for Edmonton-Strathcona, has written an excellent, concise request. You can see it [here](#). AWA submitted a very comprehensive request and you can find it [here](#).

Getting a federal impact assessment is one promising way to put the brakes on the ecological madness that coal companies, abetted by the provincial government, want to inflict on our Eastern Slopes. Please take the time to craft even a short designation request to Minister Wilkinson.

Thanks for considering this...and may this long weekend deliver the spiritual and/or chocolate fulfilment you are looking for.

Be well,

Ian Urquhart,
Conservation Director



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