
Alberta Coal Policy Committee

On March 4 2022, the government of Alberta released the Coal Policy Committee's (CPC) two reports, and announced a ministerial order to halt coal activity on the Eastern Slopes for the time being. The Coal Policy Committee process was aimed at leading a comprehensive public engagement and providing recommendations to the government on the future of coal development in the province.

The process kicked-off following the rescission of the 1976 Coal Policy, which sparked justifiable outrage in Albertans and demands to end coal exploration and mining on the Eastern Slopes. The decision to rescind the policy led to the opening up of lands to coal mining that had previously been protected, and Albertans made their voices heard in opposition to the destruction of our valued Eastern Slopes. By Feb 8, 2021 the 1976 Coal Policy was reinstated and a CPC was formed the following month.

The CPC's report provided eight recommendations for the Alberta government based on the opinions of Albertans. Among these was the recommendation to halt new coal activities on Category 3 and 4 lands (as defined in the 1976 Coal Policy) until specific regional and subregional plans under the Alberta Land Stewardship Act are completed. This recommendation has been realised by the ministerial order that was announced on March 4. Land-use plans can be an effective tool to manage multiple activities on the landscape, and should be based on thorough cumulative effects assessments and set clear, science-based thresholds for how much of certain activities are appropriate to achieve environmental sustainability. It seems clear that any assessment of cumulative effects will favour a total ban on coal mining on the Eastern Slopes – particularly because of the effects on water quality and quantity, and species-at-risk such as westslope cutthroat trout, bull trout, grizzly bear, and woodland caribou.

We are hopeful that actual science

-based bans on coal activity on the Eastern Slopes will be enshrined into legislation through these land-use plans. It is positive that new coal activity will at least be halted until the land-use planning process, which is years behind schedule, is completed. However, there are still environmental concerns related to existing projects and advanced project applications, which will continue, and inactive coal mines that remain poorly reclaimed or unreclaimed.

We also hope to see legislation in the coming months that addresses the other recommendations in the CPC report. One of these recommendations involves strengthening Indigenous involvement in land-use planning – the 1976 Coal Policy was formed entirely without the involvement of Indigenous peoples. The inherent and Treaty rights of Indigenous peoples must be respected in land-use planning and decisions on the future of coal in the province. Another recommendation pushes for a review of the Mine Financial Security Program, which currently lacks firm deadlines for reclamation, and lacks transparency about elements of companies' self-reported liabilities and what provision they've made for long-term monitoring and contingency plans. Following the disastrous rescission of the 1976 Coal Policy, meaningfully implementing the CPC's recommendations will help build trust in the government by showing Albertans that their views are respected.

– Devon Earl



With thanks to Nissa Petterson for designing the Stop Coal poster and Nick Pink for the photo.