

I want to thank the Committee for allowing me to address you today.

My name is Troy Sorensen a Councillor with the Town of Edson. I want to be clear I am approaching you today as an individual Councillor, I am not speaking on behalf of my entire Council.

I am asking individual municipal Councillors from across the Eastern Slopes of Alberta to support a letter I am sending to the Premier on the Provincial Coal Policy, but before I get into the letter let me tell you a little about myself.

I have a Masters degree from the University of Alberta in Environmental Biology and Ecology. I use to work as a Level III Wildlife Biologist for the Alberta Research Council and the province's Alberta Sustainable Resource Development. One of my jobs at the time was to review coal mining applications and Environmental Impact Assessments for wildlife concerns.

I should also note that I am a Director of the West Yellowhead UCP Board. I do not view my topic today as a partisan issue.

Lastly, I have many friends that have worked for coal mines and gone through the boom and bust of coal mining in the Edson/Hinton/and Grande Cache areas. Many of which are currently unemployed or have moved on to other careers.

The letter that I am asking you to support has 3 major concerns with the Provinces current approach to Coal:

1. My primary concerns are the unemployed workers and closed metallurgical coal mines along the Eastern Slopes. If in fact metallurgical coal is in demand, it should be extracted from existing infrastructure, with existing workforce, and on the existing land dispositions. The production of metallurgical coal at Grassy Mountain would directly compete with any sales from the 3 coal mines in Hinton and Grande Cache areas; making it extremely difficult to reopen mines that are already closed. I will also add that these mines have gone through several cycles of boom/bust in the last 20 years, so any notion that these mines are beneficial to a local economy can be counter argued with social costs. The opening of new areas to low cost/high profit coal mining also creates an unfair playing field for existing coal mines that have planned and operated under the stricter 1976 Coal Policy.
2. Secondly, I have many environmental concerns with mountain top removal, open pit mining on sensitive mountain ranges formerly protected for over 40 years by the 1976 Coal Policy. As a wildlife biologist, there will be guaranteed habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, and loss of habitat connectivity along the range. There is also a real possibility of selenium poisoning of the Old Man watershed seriously affecting wildlife, fisheries, drinking water, and agricultural operations downstream of the mine. Likewise, open pit mining uses massive amounts of fresh water and will significantly reduce the water available for downstream allocations.

3. Lastly, I believe that the best long-term sustainable use of these sensitive areas of our province is recreation, tourism, and watershed protection. The extremely localized economic benefits of mining are shortsighted, and it will take literally centuries for the habitat and watershed protection capabilities of these areas to return. The mining and removal of sensitive mountain ranges is not a local issue, it has provincial scope and should be managed and protected for the benefit of all Albertans and future generations.

I want to commend the City of Calgary for passing their unanimous motion last week on the lack of municipal consultation on the current Provincial Coal Policy. Councils as a whole often hold back in their official criticism of provincial policy for fear of retribution against their community. The goal and power of my letter is that it is signed by individual Councillors from across the Eastern Slopes making it impossible for the province to ignore, as well as impossible to retaliate against. In closing, I hope that you will support and sign my letter to the Premier as one of many individual Councillors from across the Eastern Slopes concerned with the province's current coal policy.

Thank you for your time today.