Coal BC’s Dirty Secret

Coal has a dirty secret: coal is the dirtiest fossil fuel of all and BC is North America’s biggest coal exporter. What’s worse, while our government touts its supposed ‘green’ credentials, it wants us to build more coal mines, rip up more wild places and ship out more climate-destroying coal.

British Columbia is home to some of the most extensive coal deposits in Canada, with over 20 billion tonnes of coal. New proposals for coal mines and transportation infrastructure to ship coal would seriously hurt BC’s natural environment and contribute significantly to global warming. The proposed mines in BC would impact habitat for stone sheep, grizzly bears and mountain goats, as well as destroy the winter habitat of a critically threatened caribou herd. These mines threaten to pollute ground water, and impact human health, important salmon streams and drinking water. Each year BC ships over 20 million tonnes of coal to foreign markets, where it is burned and adds to climate change, but not to BC’s reported emissions. BC only measures fossil fuels burned here, not the end emissions of the dirty coal we mine and export to offshore markets in Japan, Korea, India and China.

Historically, coal was one of BC’s earliest industries, with the first mines opening up in the 1840’s. Since then over 700 million tonnes of coal have been mined in BC – the vast majority has been dug up since 1980. That’s a lot of carbon that has been burned and spewed into the atmosphere, making the global climate crisis worse with each passing year.

The Wilderness Committee believes that coal mining should remain firmly in the province’s history, but BC’s government has big plans to allow the ramp up of coal production throughout the province. With global concern about the disastrous effects of climate change at an all time high, the BC government has gotten a lot of praise for their commitment to reducing the use of fossil fuels, the root cause of climate change. Premier Campbell prides himself as a climate leader, but carbon emissions continue to grow in BC at a rate higher than any other Canadian province, and fossil fuel extraction is continuing to expand in many regions of BC.

The climate hypocrisy is tangible. Kevin Krueger, former BC Minister of State for Mining, told the Vancouver Sun, “India would like to buy 100 million tonnes of coal annually from us… It’s fantastic. I don’t see a slowdown.”

We don’t just need a slowdown – we need to take immediate action to stop all new coal mines in British Columbia. And there’s hope: 30 years ago, the people around Hat Creek Valley in BC successfully fought a major coal mine and coal-fired power plant. A proposal to develop one of the largest coal deposits in the world was stopped in its tracks by local people who were concerned about the air their families breathe and the impact on the local environment.

From the people of the West Moberly First Nation in northeast BC to Comox Valley residents on Vancouver Island, from the Sacred Headwaters in the northwest to Deltaport in the Lower Mainland, people throughout the province are working to do the same: stand up to Big Coal and demand a real green future for British Columbia.

Grizzly bears are threatened by a coal proposal at Mt. Klappan. Photo: Wilderness Committee Archives; Elk Valley coal mines are the main source for coal exports in Canada. Photo: Garth Lenz
WHAT IS CLIMATE CHANGE and what are its causes?

Scientists have recorded that the overall temperature of the planet is rising, and that global climate patterns are changing. The use of fossil fuels and land-use decisions worldwide have been identified as the leading causes of climate change.

When you burn coal, oil or natural gas you release carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the atmosphere. Even though carbon is a fundamental building block of life, released into the atmosphere in too large amounts it can become a climate changing form of pollution.

Fossil fuels like coal and oil are the remnants of ancient plant life that have been compressed over thousands of years and are highly concentrated. Carbon released into the atmosphere traps heat on the planet like a warm blanket. This is why the planet is not a ball of ice; the planet is not a ball of ice.

Australian scientists have recorded that the impacts here at home and worldwide will only get more severe if we don’t stop the root cause of climate change - the production and use of fossil fuels.

WHAT DO WE HAVE TO DO?

The world’s top climate scientists, the UN’s International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), tell us to avoid runaway climate change we need to get the global economy off fossil fuels. That means aggressively phasing out the use of oil and coal starting today! In Canada, we would need to cut global warming pollution in half in the next ten years to meet the targets set by the IPCC to play our part in ensuring a safe global climate.

Coal Mines in BC

British Columbia is Canada’s largest exporter of coal and the second highest seaborne exporter of metallurgical coal globally.

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Pacific Gateway Port Expansion

Most people don’t realize how much coal is being exported from Deltaport on the West Coast of Canada. Currently this port is the largest coal exporting facility anywhere in North America.

The BC and Federal Governments have a plan to invest billions of taxpayers’ dollars in a scheme they call the Pacific Gateway Strategy. The plan calls for an expansion of the existing ports along the West Coast, including Delta, North Vancouver, Prince Rupert and Kitimat. These expansions would facilitate increased exports of dirty coal and tar sands oil. The Gateway plan would exacerbate the climate crisis by supplying the dirtiest energy sources to emerging economies in the Asia-Pacific region such as China and India.

By expanding Canada’s role in fossil fuel exports, our governments are not only being irresponsible at home, but are also profiting from enabling the climate crisis abroad. Canada should be a climate leader, not a climate profiteer.

Hundred of local residents have packed the halls at public meetings regarding a coal mine proposal in the Comox Valley on northern Vancouver Island. There is a long history of coal mining in the region, and many attended at the meetings brought forward cautionary tales about negative impacts to health and the local environment. Sensitive salmon habitat could also be heavily impacted by this mining project. Local residents are also concerned about this mine’s potential contribution to climate change if it’s allowed to go forward. The mine is projected to produce 2.2 million tonnes of coal per year or 44 million tonnes over the 20 year expected life of the mine.

Raven Coal

Drake Side, who is BC’s top caribou expert and a Wildlife Ecologist, has stated that the herd is “critically endangered.” There are only 11 remaining caribou in the Bruneau Caribou Herd, legally defined as “Threatened” under the federal Species at Risk Act. At the time this paper went to press the court had not yet ruled. Regardless of the outcome of this important court case, the fight to protect this already heavily impacted region in the northeast of B.C. will continue.

Coal Prospect of Interest

Osbourn caribou, and is the starting point for three of the most important salmon rivers in BC: the Skeena, the Nass and the Stikine. The Mt. Klappan coal license is an open pit mine site that would destroy over 15,000 hectares of world heritage wilderness that is considered sacred by the local First Nations people. This project would have massive impact on fisheries, wildlife, and the traditional way of life for the Wet’suwet’en people. For this reason this project is strongly opposed by the local First Nations.

The drive to build new transmission lines in the northwest is driven largely by the mining sector, and independent power producers (IPPs). One of the mines that would rely on this transmission line is the proposed Klappan Coal Mine, near the “Sacred Headwaters.” This region is home to large grizzly bear populations, stone sheep and rare vegetation.

The people of the West Moberly First Nations are the traditional inhabitants of a area north of Chetwynd, BC. They have taken the province of BC and a BC mining company to court in an attempt to protect the region’s endangered mountain caribou from a proposed coal mine project.

“We are not alone in believing that these permits are a death sentence to the caribou. Both our Elders and the government scientists are on the same page. They all agree that coal mining in the caribou’s critical habitat will result in significant adverse effects.”

Chief Rolland Wilson, West Moberly First Nations

Hwy 37 and the Mount Klappan

Proposed as a project to provide communities in Northern BC clean energy, the Highway 37 electrification project is supported by several dirty mining companies.

"If Mt. Klappan coal is exported to produce steel, as Fortune Minerals proposes, it could eventually add 10.5 million tonnes of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere every year. That’s equal to nearly one sixth of British Columbia’s total emissions, and it would make the Northwest a major global contributor to climate change.”

Pembina Institute Report

Comox Valley CoalWatch Archives

CoMox Valley, Vancouver Island

First Coal Corp

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WHAT WE CAN DO

The contrast between BC government rhetoric and BC government policy regarding climate change is striking. Many in Canada were shocked to learn that BC was the only province that saw its emissions from industrial sources increase last year, largely because of the growing fossil fuel industry in the province. If BC is to play a responsible role in the world in the age of action on climate change we need to get out of the coal business. This means stopping the growth of the industry today and strategically phasing it out while focusing on creating good jobs to help with the transition. Here are the critical things to do:

1) No new coal mines

The Raven, First Coal, and Mount Klappan mines would have significant local health and environmental impacts, from clearcut logging to releasing toxic waste into the local environment. Stopping new coal mines is also a concrete action we can take to fight climate change. There is nothing we could do that would be more counterproductive than building more coal mines. We need to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels to avoid runaway climate change—just that simple.

2) Phase out existing coal mines

All coal is dirty and carbon intensive, whether it is used to produce electricity, or like much of the coal mined in BC, is used to produce steel. There is no way we can burn more and more coal for any purpose if we are going to be able to “de-carbonise” the global economy. We must phase coal mining out in BC by 2050.

3) Getting serious about green jobs

We need to get serious about finding jobs for people in coal and oil towns to help the transition away from fossil fuel dependence. To achieve this we must target investment in the places where people will be most affected by stronger climate change legislation. There are tremendous opportunities to have better recycling measures, energy-efficient home retrofits, green buildings, better public transit, and renewable energy that is both green initiatives. May 16, 2008. http://www.canada. green initiatives. May 16, 2008. http://www.canada. green initiatives. May 16, 2008. http://www.canada.

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