



COAL BC'S DIRTY SECRET

Elk Valley coal mines are the main source for coal exports in Canada. Photo: Garth Lenz

WHY IS COAL DIRTY?

Coal is one of the most harmful fossil fuels to human health. Whenever coal is mined, transported or crushed, coal dust is formed. This coal dust is a major air pollutant in areas near mines, shipping terminals and coal powered generators. When inhaled, it can lead to black lung disease, asthma and other respiratory problems. People living next to coal production have higher risk of contracting cardiopulmonary disease, hypertension, lung disease and kidney disease⁹.

A tremendous amount of water is used for extracting and cleaning coal. Coal deposits are commonly located close to aquifers. The end result is the potential for exposure to toxins in groundwater, as well as more and more of our water being used for industrial purposes¹⁰.

Burning coal also releases mercury, which is particularly toxic to young children. Mercury can cause memory loss, kidney failure, liver damage, loss of vision, loss of sensation and tremors¹¹. With all the available medical evidence about how dangerous coal is, there is no excuse for putting people's health and lives at risk.

BC has a dirty secret: coal is the dirtiest fossil fuel of all and BC is North America's biggest coal exporter². 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 coal³. 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 markets⁴, 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 1980⁵. 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 BC⁶.

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.*"⁷

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 environment⁸.

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 open pit mine. Photo: Global Forest Watch

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 change¹².

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, if 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 carbon in the earth's atmosphere has historically trapped just the right amount of heat from the sun on the planet to support life. Since the industrial revolution around 200 years ago, we have burned a lot of fossil fuels and this carbon is trapped

in the atmosphere. Over time, as more and more carbon is trapped it's like adding another blanket trapping more heat and throwing the planets delicately balanced climate systems out of balance and destabilizing the climate¹³.

WHY DOES CLIMATE CHANGE MATTER?

Climate change matters to people because it is very rapidly changing the face of the planet we all live on.

Already people in some countries are experiencing desertification, coastal areas being flooded and more extreme weather conditions. There are also related impacts on crops, species habitat, and a wide range of agricultural and forest pests. One of the most visible climate impacts in BC has been the pine beetle epidemic, where a previously manageable pest has rampaged out of control, consuming a massive area of forest because there has not been a winter cold enough to kill it off.

Scientists tell us 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?

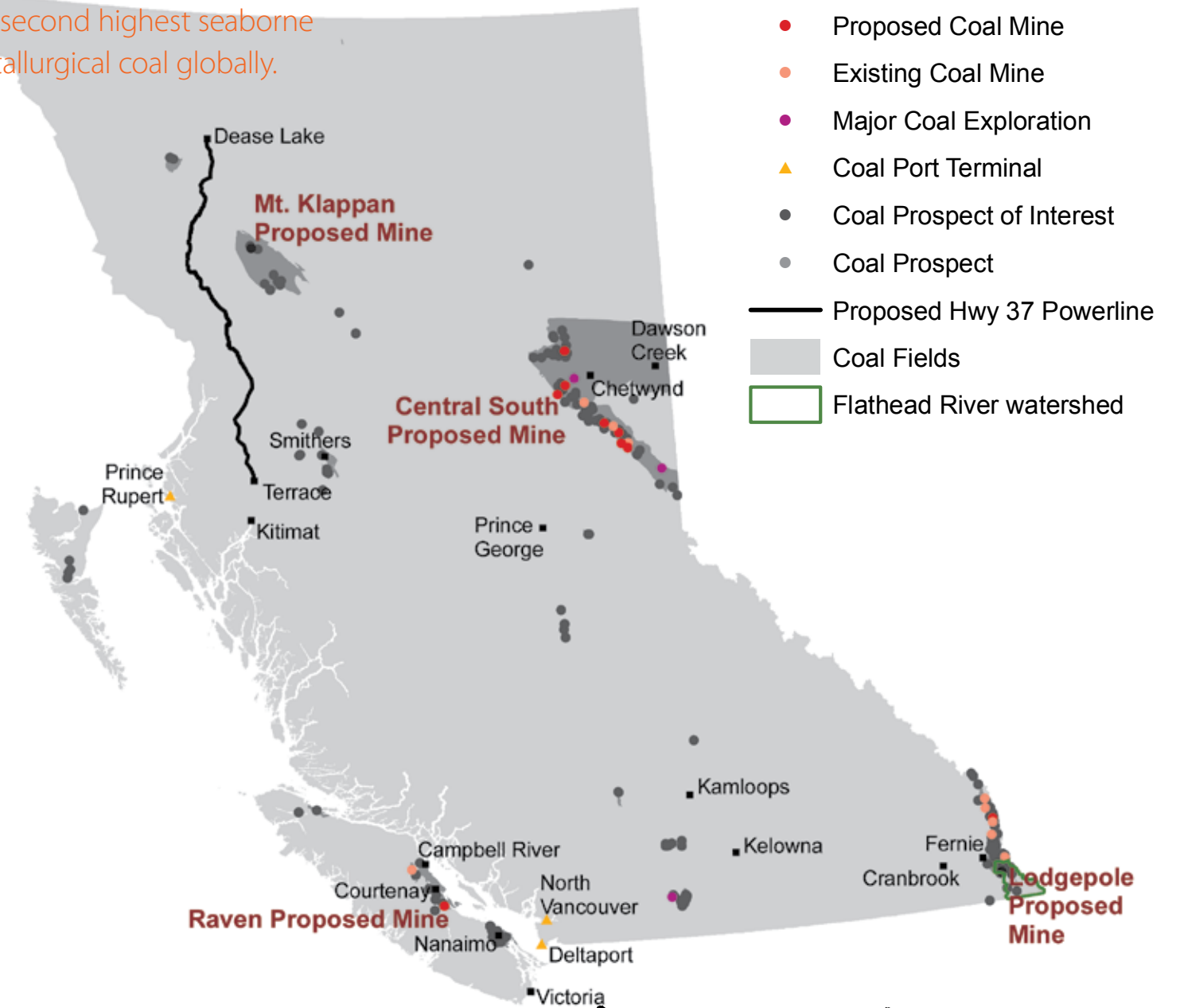
The world's top climate scientists, the UN's International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), tell us that to avoid runaway climate change we need to get the global economy off fossil fuels¹⁴. That means aggressively phasing out the use of oil and coal starting today! In Canada we would need to cut global 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 climate¹⁵.



Woodland caribou are threatened by coal mining. Photo: Wilderness Committee archives; Pine beetle kill in BC, a sea of dead trees. Photo: V Smoother, used under Creative Commons license.

COAL MINES IN BC

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



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 America¹⁶.

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 India¹⁷. 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.



Railways are a key transportation method for BC's dirty coal. Photo: Scott Granneman, used under Creative Commons license; Coal ready for export from Deltaport at Roberts Bank, BC. Photo: Calen Darnel

RAVEN COAL COMOX VALLEY, VANCOUVER ISLAND

Hundreds 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 attendees 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 mine¹⁸.

"Public concern is growing rapidly. People are concerned about the risks associated with a coal mine in the heart of the Baynes Sound watershed"
Campbell Connor of CoalWatch Comox Valley.



FIRST COAL CORP WEST MOBERLY PEOPLE FIGHT BACK

The people of the West Moberly First Nations are the traditional inhabitants of an 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

Dr. Dale Siep, 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 Brunt Pine 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 BC will continue¹⁹.



HWY 37 AND THE MOUNT KLAPPAN

touted as a project to provide clean energy, the Highway 37 electrification project is supported by several dirty mining companies. 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

Osborn caribou, and is the starting point for three of the most important salmon rivers in BC: the Stikine, the Nass and the Skeena. The Mt. Klappan coal license is for an open pit mine that that would destroy over 15,000 hectares of pristine wilderness that is considered sacred by the local First Nations people. This project would have massive impact on fisheries and 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 Nations²⁰.

*"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."*²⁰
Pembina Institute Report.

Comox Valley CoalWatch meeting, citizens opposing the Raven coal proposal. Photo: Wendy Keating; First Coal attempting to restrict access to West Moberly traditional territory. Photo: West Moberly First Nations; The Sacred Headwaters: the confluence of the Skeena, Stikine and Nass Rivers. This area is threatened by the Mt. Klappan coal mine. Photo: Wilderness Committee Archives

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 province²¹. 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 then 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 to build more coal mines. We need to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels to avoid runaway climate change—it's 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.



Stone sheep are threatened by coal mining in BC. Photo: Wilderness Committee archives; Clearer skies ahead in a future without coal. Photo: Brandon Godfrey, used under Creative Commons license; Community members rally with unions and environmentalists for green jobs. Photo: Green for All

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 environmentally appropriate and in the public interest.



Citations

- ¹ Natural Resources Canada: Energy Sources. About Coal <http://www.nrcan.gc.ca/eneene/sources/coacha-eng.php>
- ^{2,3&4} Government Brochure. Investing in BC's Coal Resources: Opportunities, Logistics and Infrastructure. pg. 1 <http://www.empr.gov.bc.ca/MACR/investors/Documents/CoalbrochureFINALAug09.pdf>
- ⁵ BC Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources website. Coal in BC by Barry Ryan 2002 <http://www.empr.gov.bc.ca/Mining/Geoscience/Coal/CoalBC/Pages/default.aspx>
- ⁶ CBC News BC. only province with rising greenhouse gases Monday, December 21, 2009. <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/british-columbia/story/2009/12/21/bc-greenhouse-gas-increase.html>
- ⁷ Vancouver Province B.C.'s coal exports clash with new green initiatives. May 16, 2008. <http://www.canada.com/theprovince/news/story.html?id=8c1ef0a3-f43d-4e17-af96-12ca49d6f632>
- ⁸ Dr. Mike Carr Bioregionalism and civil society: democratic challenges to corporate globalism. P. 188
- ⁹ Hendryx M, Ahern MM. Relations between health indicators and residential proximity to coal mining in West Virginia. American Journal of Public Health. 2008 April 98(4) 669-71
- ¹⁰ RTI International Human and Ecological Risk Assessment of Coal Combustion Wastes <http://www.earthjustice.org/library/reports/epa-coal-combustion-waste-risk-assessment.pdf>
- ¹¹ Pollution Probe website: Why is Mercury a Concern <http://www.pollutionprobe.org/Happening/hgbackgrounder.htm>
- ¹² IPCC 4th Assessment Report. Chapter 3 Emission Scenarios. <http://www.ipcc.ch/ipccreports/sres/emission/116.htm>
- ¹³ IPCC 4th Assessment Report - Climate Change 2001 - Complete online versions. 1.3 Human-induced Climate Variations. http://www.grida.no/publications/other/ipcc_tar/?src=/climate/ipcc_tar/wg1/044.htm
- ¹⁴ Eilperin, Juliet. Washington Post. February 3, 2007. Humans Faulted for Global Warming. International Panel of Climate Scientists Sounds Dire Alarm <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/02/AR2007020200192.html>
- ¹⁵ Environment Canada Report. A Climate Change Plan for the Purposes of the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act - 2007. P.5 http://www.ec.gc.ca/doc/ed-es/p_123/CC_Plan_2007_e.pdf
- ¹⁶ BC Government Brochure. Investing in BC's Coal Resources: Opportunities, Logistics and Infrastructure. pg. 1 <http://www.empr.gov.bc.ca/MACR/investors/Documents/CoalbrochureFINALAug09.pdf>
- ¹⁷ BC Government Brochure. Investing in BC's Coal Resources: Opportunities, Logistics and Infrastructure. pg. 17 <http://www.empr.gov.bc.ca/MACR/investors/Documents/CoalbrochureFINALAug09.pdf>
- ¹⁸ Coal Watch Comox Valley Website <http://www.coalwatch.ca/courtenay-meeting-concern-about-raven-packs-another-room>
- ¹⁹ CBC News Mine threatens caribou: First Nation February 1, 2010 <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/british-columbia/story/2010/02/01/bc-caribou-coal-mine-chetwynd.html>
- ²⁰ Pembina Institute. A Future at What Cost. The Proposed Coal Mine at Mount Klappan. <http://pubs.pembina.org/reports/Klappan-fs.pdf>
- ²¹ See reference 6

TAKE ACTION

Write a letter to Environment Minister Barry Penner and Premier Gordon Campbell. Tell them what you think about kicking BC's coal habit and building a real green economy for our future.

Gordon Campbell

Room 156, Parliament Buildings,
Victoria, BC, V8V 1X4
Ph: 250 387-1715 Fax: 250 387-0087
Email: premier@gov.bc.ca

Barry Penner

PO Box 9047, Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC, V8W 9E2
Ph: 250 387-1187 Fax: 250 387-1356
Email: env.minister@gov.bc.ca

JOIN OUR
CLIMATE ACTION LIST
to get email updates on these
campaigns and find out how
you can get involved. Visit
wildernesscommittee.org/coal
or call 604 683 8220

info@wildernesscommittee.org • 1-800-661-WILD (9453)



I want British Columbia to kick the coal habit

Enclosed is: \$25 \$50 \$100 Other \$ _____
Fed. reg. charity #11929-3009-RR0001

I want to become a member! Enclosed is my annual fee for a:

\$35 Individual Membership \$52 Family Membership

NAME _____ PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____ CITY _____

PROV _____ POSTAL CODE _____ EMAIL _____

The Wilderness Committee is Canada's largest membership-based wilderness preservation organization.

clip
And return to the:
Wilderness Committee
227 Abbott Street,
Vancouver, BC V6B 2K7

call
(604) 683-8220 in the
Lower Mainland
1-800-661-9453 toll-free
elsewhere in Canada

Credits

Writing and Editing: Ben West, Tria Donaldson, Stephanie Gribble, Matthew Sasaki, Andrew Radzik, Sven Biggs.
Design and illustrations: Gil Aguilar.
Mapping: Geoff Senichenko.
Photos: As noted.

Wilderness Committee Vol. 29, No 2, 2010. Canadian Mail Product Sales Agreement No. 0900567. Posted in Vancouver for free distribution. Printed in Canada on recycled newsprint with vegetable-based inks. **Press Run 40,000** © Wilderness Committee 2010. All rights reserved. Written material may be used without permission when credit is given.

Published by
Wilderness Committee — National Office
227 Abbott Street, Vancouver, BC, V6B 2K7
T: 604-683-8220 F: 604-683-8229

