



New Coal Mine Would Jeopardize Water & Wildlife in B.C. Rockies

Proposed open pit coal mine by Elk River threatens internationally significant wildlife corridor

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Fernie, B.C. – An open pit coal mine proposed for the Elk Valley would jeopardize a crucial international wildlife corridor and contravene a United Nations recommendation for a moratorium on new coal mines in the Elk, conservation groups warned today.

“This mine would be smack in the middle of a globally-significant wildlife corridor that UNESCO has asked B.C. to protect,” said Wildsight Southern Rockies Program Manager Ryland Nelson. “It would be added to five existing coal mines, four mine expansion proposals and three exploration projects in the Elk valley. This is simply too much stress for this watershed.”

Centermount Coal Ltd.'s Bingay project, which is 45 per cent Chinese-owned, has just entered the B.C. environmental assessment process. The open pit mine would be built alongside the Elk River, which is a specially designated as a classified waters trout fishery (a special designation for highly productive trout streams). The Elk is one of the last strongholds for genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout and endangered bull trout.

“A new open pit coal mine next to the Elk River is a crazy idea,” said Sierra Club BC spokesperson Sarah Cox. “The Elk River already has alarmingly high levels of selenium from existing coal mines. And this mine would be in the middle of a wildlife corridor that connects two World Heritage Sites.”

The proposed mine, 21 kilometres north of Elkford, is located entirely within identified Ungulate Winter Range, a habitat that is already heavily impacted by historical mining activities. At completion, it would be more than a square kilometre in area, and up to 500 metres deep.

Sierra Club BC, Wildsight, CPAWS BC and the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y) are calling for a federal environmental assessment of the Bingay project in addition to a B.C. assessment. The public can request a federal review by sending a quick note to Bingay@ceaa-acee.gc.ca by December 23, 2012.

The Bingay mine site forms part of the same wildlife corridor that includes the Flathead River Valley and Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park – a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Mining and energy development has now been banned in the adjacent Flathead River Valley through provincial legislation in B.C.

“In a 2010 report, UNESCO's World Heritage Committee called for a moratorium on mining developments in the Elk Valley,” said Chloe O'Loughlin, Terrestrial Conservation Manager for CPAWS BC. “An open pit mine this close to the Elk River will negatively affect wildlife. This could ultimately impact the whole corridor, including the nearby Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park.”

Conservation groups are asking for a comprehensive long-term plan for the entire Elk Valley that reconciles its world-class wildlife and wilderness values with its metallurgical coal resources, in keeping with the recommendations of the World Heritage Committee report.

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