

Sample Answers to Commonly Questions/Objections

When asked questions, you can always direct people to the Alberta Beyond Coal, AEN and Council of Canadians websites where they can find the answers to their questions. These sites have the expert knowledge!

Q: What about the jobs this will bring?

It's important that people have reliable, good jobs. Yes, coal mining would create some jobs, but there are questions as to how many and how long they would last.

- Coal prices can fluctuate widely on the international market. This means that mines can open and close depending on market prices (swing mines) and be unreliable as a source of steady employment. Coal mines in NE BC and the Grande Cache Mine in central Alberta provide a cautionary tale of this nature.
- If mines are open only intermittently, the indirect jobs created by coal also risk being lost.

Are there other kinds of jobs that could be created for this area that are more long-term and sustainable?

- Recreation and tourism related industries in Crowsnest Pass are growing. These include guided hiking, skiing, fly fishing, scrambling, rock climbing, spelunking, trail running (including the Minotaur Skyrace—the only SkyRacing event in North America), Crowsnest Lake Bible Camp, mountain biking and more. Mountain towns and parks are major tourist draws. The Crowsnest area is ideally situated to increase its participation in that market as it is on a major route west.
- Having in-depth conversations with people who live in and around the region is an important step that needs to be taken. What ideas do they have? What kinds of jobs would they hope to see?

Q: And the revenue?

A: Alberta only receives 1% royalties on the coal from our mines. Yes, it would bring in some immediate tax revenue and increase local economic activity, but it is not necessarily long-term or reliable.

- For Grassy Mountain, Benga (the mine's owner) is estimating annual royalty payments of \$30 million per year. Given the volatility of coal's prices this is not guaranteed. Experts in coal and coal markets are raising doubts that this is a reliable estimate. For instance, Teck's Cheviot Coal mine, which also produces metallurgical coal, only paid \$10 million in royalties in 2017 to Alberta.
- If these mines close when coal prices fall, they will not generate consistent royalties or tax revenues.

Q: And diversifying the economy?

A: From one perspective that's true. It's a new economic opportunity for some areas. On the other hand, the price of coal can vary dramatically, another boom-and-bust situation. These proposed mines also have relatively short lifespans, so this may not be the best strategy to expand our long-term economic horizons.

- There are other businesses in the area that may be damaged by nearby coal mining —see above.
- What do people in Crowsnest want?

Q: Don't we need this coal for steel?

A: Yes, the coal from these mines would be used for making steel. However, much of the coal in this area is not the right quality/grade for steel manufacturing. Also, new technologies mean that less coal will be needed in the future to make the steel we need.

- Mines in the Crowsnest Pass region began shutting down after WW2--the last one closed in 1983 (Tent Mountain). As the steel industry modernized, their coal no longer met industry standards.
- Studies of Grassy Mountain's data have determined that only 16% of its coal reserves are the high-quality grade coal needed for modern steel production.
- New steel manufacturing technologies such as electric arc furnaces and direct reduced iron processes are decreasing the need for coking/metallurgical coal. Steel can be recycled repeatedly, further reducing the need for coal.

Q: What about all the pollution when it's burned abroad?

A: There is pollution all along the way from mining to production to consumption. Coal and steelmaking are global industries making a product we all want and use.

Q: How do we know this will be harmful?

A: Coal mining releases high amounts of selenium. It contaminates the water and is very harmful to fish and wildlife. If people are exposed to high amounts of it in their drinking water, it can cause serious health issues. AHS's website has good information on that. Currently, there are no proven technologies that can adequately control the release of selenium when a mine is operating, nor are there any that can successfully remediate/clean it up after a mine closes.

- Water with [toxic concentrations of selenium](#) causes deformities, nerve damage, and reproductive failure in fish, mammals, and migratory birds.
- People exposed to high levels of selenium in food and water can suffer from nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, hair loss and neurological problems

- There is also the risk of a tailing pond breach such as the Obed Mine disaster in 2013. A toxic plume of selenium, arsenic, zinc, lead, mercury entered the Athabasca River and travelled more than 1,100 kilometres downstream.
- Mines in the Eastern Slopes pose a threat to a number of at-risk species including Grizzly bears, westslope cutthroat trout, bull trout, whitebark pine, limber pine and more. Mining operations will destroy habitat and impact wildlife corridors.

Q: Didn't coal exploration stop back in April?

A: Yes and no. (Some exploration stopped, but not all) Exploration was suspended only in some areas (Category 2 lands) and only until the consultation ends this fall. Exploration and development can continue in other parts of the Eastern Slopes. For instance, Grassy Mountain and Tent Mountain can still legally continue activities (they are on Category 4 lands).

- The categories are as follows: Category 1—National Parks, Wilderness Areas, proposed or present Provincial Parks, and wildlife sanctuaries; Category 2—parts of the Southern Rockies and Foothills; Category 3—Northern forested regions and eastern regions of the Eastern Slopes; and Category 4—areas not covered under the other categories.

Q: Didn't the government put the old policy back in place?

A: Yes, sort of. The policy was reinstated temporarily. The coal consultation process is working to create a new coal policy which will replace the 1976 Land Use policy.

- We are fighting for a no coal policy. Any new policy that permits coal mining will bring real risks and damage our mountains irreparably.
- The coal policy committee is due to give its report to Minister Savage by November 15, 2021.
- Minister Savage has stated clearly that this will be a “modern coal policy” to allow for expanded coal development in Alberta.

Q: Isn't there a consultation process going on that is looking at the issue?

A: Yes, there is. But its terms of reference are very narrow. They do not include the impact of coal mining on land use, water use, wildlife protection, proper Indigenous consultation and existing regional plans and interprovincial agreements around land and water use.

Q: What about renewables?

A: Renewables are a separate issue from this one. This coal would be used for steel manufacturing, not for electricity and heating.

Q: What's your position on renewables?

A: Try to not get sidetracked. The salient topic here is what's going to happen to our Rockies. Maybe say: Renewables are an important conversation, but it's a separate issue. How do you feel about our mountains having their peaks blasted off and permanently removed?

Q: What about all the other activity in the region?

A: That's a good question. There is significant recreation and industrial activity already taking place in the region. It also needs to be considered thoughtfully. However, coal will disrupt and negatively impact those other activities, especially recreation and tourism.