

Watchdogs condemn sour gas decision

By Jen Gerson, May 28, 2011

Environmental groups are calling for changes to the Energy Resources Conservation Board after a denied court decision opened ecologically sensitive land to a sour gas project.

A resident of southwestern Alberta's Castle region, Mike Judd, asked the ERCB to reconsider the Shell Canada project as he believes it would threaten local grizzly bears.

In March, the regulatory agency denied the request, allowing the project to move forward.

Earlier this week, the Alberta Court of Appeal denied Judd's bid to appeal the ERCB's ruling.

Several conservation groups, including the Sierra Club Canada, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and the Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition condemned Friday's decision.

"How the appeal was denied highlights the major flaw in the process of how we make these decisions," said Sarah Elmeligi, senior conservation planner with the southern Alberta chapter of CPAWS. The legal process has been time consuming and onerous, she said.

Judd's case involved going through an ERCB hearing that did not consider other projects in the area, such as logging, she added.

"There's no way for the public to try to influence the hearing unless they are landowners directly affected by the process," she said.

The ERCB denies these charges. Rather, Bob Curran, spokesman for the provincial agency, said environmental groups have always been allowed to participate in hearings.

"Generally speaking, the board often hears criticism from different parties. The public says we side with industry or other special-interest groups," Curran said. "Industry says we're too public-friendly, we have too many rules, we're too green."

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