

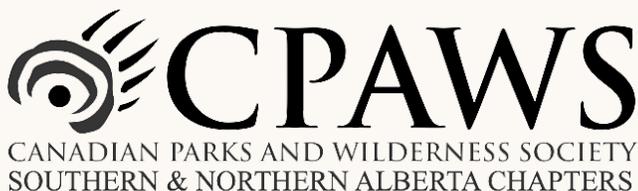
AUGUST 2021

SUBMISSION TO THE COAL POLICY COMMITTEE



**COAL DEVELOPMENT IS AT ODDS
WITH THE NATURAL VALUES OF
ALBERTA'S EASTERN SLOPES**
A CONSERVATION AND POLICY ANALYSIS

PREPARED BY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

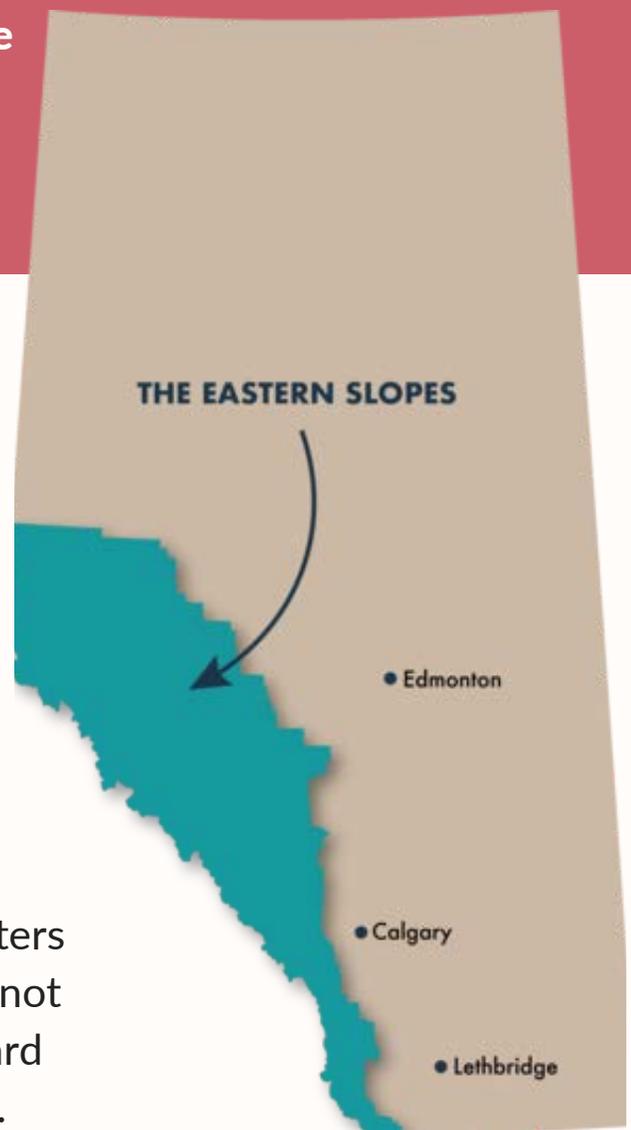
Collectively, Albertans understand that in order to have healthy, sustainable communities, our ecosystems and water supply must also be healthy and sustainable. Our daily lives rely on nature and the services it provides. Drinking water, crop pollination, fresh air, flood prevention, human mental and physical well-being, and employment are all benefits that people get from nature.

The Eastern Slopes of Alberta are part of the 0.6 percent (or 56,000 km²) of the country that have been identified as hotspots for delivering these critical benefits:

- Freshwater
- Carbon storage
- Critical wildlife habitat
- Recreation opportunities

Coal mine exploration and development threaten these resource by:

- Fragmenting important habitat
- Leaching hard metals into our source waters
- Creating environmental damage that cannot be remediated or mitigated to the standard Albertans and the prairie provinces need.



For these reasons, coal development should not occur on the Eastern Slopes of Alberta.

THE 1976 COAL POLICY

Forty-five years after its creation, the 1976 Coal Development Policy (“coal policy”) no longer addresses the complex nature of human use on the Eastern Slopes.

Here's why:



- Human use of this region has grown in volume and type, and includes forestry, oil and gas activity, and an array of recreational pursuits.
- Regional and sub-regional plans for portions of the Eastern Slopes have not been completed.
- There are substantive gaps in regulation that result in ineffective management of the area as a whole.

It is also important to note that the **public consultation requirement** for the Alberta Energy Regulator’s assessment of coal exploration and development permits is **woefully inadequate**. Above all else, conservation and community values must be protected.

CATEGORY 2 LANDS

When the Coal Policy was created in 1976, certain lands were set aside as **too valuable and too sensitive for open-pit mining** – these were labeled as Category 2.

CATEGORY 4 LANDS

Other areas that had some previous small scale mine activities were **left open for potential future mining** and zoned as Category 4. **However, these lands and waters were no less culturally or ecologically valuable.**

Furthermore, the scale of mines proposed by coal companies today is much bigger than those proposed in decades past.

It is time for a new vision and plan for Alberta’s Eastern Slopes

A NEW VISION & PLAN FOR THE EASTERN SLOPES

We outline the values that Eastern Slopes provide Albertans, including:

1. **Water quality and quantity**
2. **Species at risk**, including:
 - Native trout
 - Five-needled pines
 - Grizzly bears
 - Caribou
3. **Environmentally-sensitive areas**
4. **Landscape connectivity**
5. **Fescue grasslands**
6. **Biodiversity**
7. **Climate refugia**

INDIGENOUS & TREATY RIGHTS

Importantly, the Eastern Slopes are also the traditional territories of Treaty 6, 7, and 8 First Nations, as well as Alberta Metis Nation 3. This comes with a responsibility to honour and uphold Indigenous and Treaty rights on these lands. A number of these Nations have stated that they do not feel that they have been adequately consulted nor been engaged in meaningful dialogue about their vision for the landscape.

DIVERSIFYING ALBERTA'S ECONOMY

A coal policy that protects the Eastern Slopes from coal exploration and development would provide certainty to policymakers and entrepreneurs aiming to diversify Alberta's economy in a sustainable, regenerative way. **This coal policy should say no to coal exploration and development across the Eastern Slopes and be followed by legislation which protects the Eastern Slopes from coal mining.**

Opportunities to nurture new, emerging economies that would support Canada's climate goals, create green jobs, and last for generations are within arms' reach. Studies have clearly shown that amenity migration into rural communities is accelerated when nearby parks, wilderness, and natural areas are valued and protected, rather than exploited by industry (Johnson, 2006). The declining use and acceptance of fossil fuels and the potential liability associated with coal exploration and development makes a focus on sustainable economies even more timely.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the extremely high social, environmental, and economic value of the Eastern Slopes, as well as commitments to honour Treaty rights and advance reconciliation efforts with Indigenous Peoples, CPAWS and Y2Y believe that a precautionary approach must be taken in the creation of a new coal policy.

Particularly, **given that comprehensive cumulative effects assessments and detailed land-use planning has not been completed for the region, it is inappropriate to designate any area along the Eastern Slopes for new coal mines.** As leading conservation organizations in the province and in the country, we are pleased to have our knowledge, perspectives and opinions considered and included in The Committee's recommendations.



Our recommendations are based on

- **The inherent value of the Eastern Slopes**, which only exists if the landscape is restored and remains intact.
- **The headwaters and landscapes of the Eastern Slopes are critical** to the future of our province. Our communities, agricultural production, food production, tourism, and recreation all rely on these landscapes existing in as intact a state as possible and their watersheds providing clean water. Water is an increasingly at-risk limited resource critical to present and future generations.
- **The long-term negative impacts** on the environment, human health, animal health and existing and emerging economies far outweigh the new jobs, taxes, royalties or economics that may be generated in the relative short-term as a result of coal development in this area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend inclusion of five key principles in a new coal policy:



No further coal exploration or development will be permitted on the Eastern Slopes of Alberta, including expansions of existing operations. The new coal policy should cover the entire area previously covered by the 1976 Coal Development Policy and prohibit new exploration and development in this entire area.



Existing thermal and metallurgical coal mining operations in this region will be permitted to reach the end of their lives but must meet all provincial and federal guidelines and regulations, including water quality guidelines, for the duration of operations, post-closure and post-reclamation.



Reclamation of lands disturbed by coal exploration activities with coal exploration permits must be reclaimed by the company no later than December 31, 2025. Reclamation costs should be covered in full by the companies and not fall to the taxpayer.



Closure and reclamation of mines no longer in operation should occur as soon as possible. Re-opening of mines in Care and Maintenance should be considered as 'new mine operation' and not be permitted.



Comprehensive land-use planning, including cumulative effects assessment and threshold planning, should be conducted across the Eastern Slopes to address the impacts of all other land-uses and activities in the region as soon as possible. The Land Use Framework contains the tools for Regional Plans and/or subregional plans that take this comprehensive approach.