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C/025/0005*

From: "Kevin Poe" <iamthedarkranger@gmail.com>
To: <daronhaddock@utah.gov>
CC: <broncobobbi@gmail.com>
Date: 5/21/2008 7:22 PM
Subject: Alton Coal Mine permit # C/025/005

Mr. Haddock,

Please allow me to register my extreme opposition to the Alton Coal Mine permit for the proposed mine just north of Kanab Utah. For the past nine years my family and I have lived in Tropic Utah. I've been a resident of Southern Utah for most of my 36 years on this planet. I understand and sympathize with those looking to improve our regional economy but the Alton Coal Mine will not accomplish that. Indeed, instead it is likely to hurt our economy and not just in the long run -- the hurt will begin almost immediately!

Those behind this coal mine care nothing for our local economy (in spite of the 30-40 truck driver jobs it may create) as is abundantly evident by the key information and calculations they leave out of their permit and that your agency team apparently didn't investigate as part of the NEAP process. These include congestion and wear and tear to our highways, displacing thousands of paying visitors from the region, downwind pollution, and global climate change. As you must realize these are the real issues that concern us here in Garfield County and to the extent you ignore them, you ignore us!

Destruction of our Highways!

Trucking coal uphill at the proposed rate of one 40 ton truck every 120 seconds through Panguitch is insane! Imagine the extreme safety hazard these trucks will make for winter driving conditions. Highway 20 and especially Highway 89 was never designed for that kind of abuse that a continuous stream of 40 ton vehicles will create. The roads will quickly fall apart. And who will pay for these highway rebuilds? Me the taxpayer. I know that the corporate overlords of the Alton Coal Mine will not contribute a dime to the mess their truck will cause. Why? Because they won't have to pay above and beyond the taxes (both federal and state) per gallon of diesel they buy. Which of course is TOTALLY not fair to the rest of us, because even though we may get more miles per gallon in our cars and trucks, our vehicles don't create 1/10 the impact that 40 ton trucks will!

Now consider how 1 truck every 120 seconds will make it difficult even to cross the street in Panguitch! We will need to change the red flashing light to a regular street light just so people will be able to walk in their town. Perhaps we will need more than one? And of course that full traffic light(s) will be the first one in our entire 5000 square mile county, forever changing both symbolically and actually, the rural character of our county that is simultaneously the reason most of us live here AND the reason millions come to visit us from all over the world, which gives us our currently healthy tourism economy.

Impact to Tourism

So, worse yet all this coal truck traffic on Highway 89 will be a huge deterrent to the millions of domestic and international visitors that come to visit the Bryce Canyon region. With so much heavy truck traffic straggling up and down Hwy 89 and Hwy 20 the word will soon get out that

it's not worth the trouble to see Bryce after visiting Zion and instead many will stay on the interstates and go directly on to Arches and Canyonlands. True, I am a park ranger at Bryce Canyon so my bias is obvious, but as such, I strive to strengthen this tourism economy and protect it from being spoiled. Keep in mind that Garfield County's 2 biggest employers are Bryce Canyon National Park and Ruby's Inn. Indeed most of our economy is a tourism economy. What we may gain with the Alton Coal mine (30-40 truck drivers) we will lose 10 times that many jobs from our tourism economy as these trucks drive the visitors away! -- all puns intended.

As an astronomer / ranger I can assure you that 30,000 people a year come to see Bryce Canyon's world famous night sky. Every single one of those visitors has to stay overnight somewhere in the immediate vicinity. The quality of our darkness directly relates to our tourism economy. The first time the Alton Coal Mine was stopped back in the 1980s it was mostly due to the fact that the site was going to be in direct line of sight of Bryce Canyon National Park. Even though the new site is around the corner of a ridge it will nevertheless negatively impact the beauty of our night sky both in terms of light pollution and the dust generated by the extraction and pre-processing of the coal at the mine. As has been documented many times over, dust and even light pollution do not require direct line of sight to mar the sky for many miles in all directions. Again is losing any of these 30,000 overnight stays worth 30-40 truck driver jobs that may or may not come from our communities?

Down Wind Pollution

Your study also seems to avoid the question as to where the coal will be burned? Why is that not known precisely? Again perhaps that's not the BLM's legal authority to question BUT nevertheless a complete betrayal of the public trust not to provide us with that information, when we are trying to determine whether to support this proposal or not.

This is of paramount importance because the coal in question is sub-bituminous in quality which means it's only slightly better than peat in terms of its energy production versus ash content. While it may be low in sulfur that in the lesser of many evils. The industry calls it clean coal only because it is low in Sulfur. What about Mercury? Was the coal tested for that? If so why wasn't that content published? What about Uranium? "Clean Coal" is like "healthy bacon." There is NO SUCH THING -- just degrees of lies!

I happen to know that this coal does contain a lot of uranium as do all Mesozoic age rocks in Utah but especially coal because uranium is so water soluble and coal forms in bogs. If as speculated the coal will be burned near Las Vegas (if it wasn't going to be they would truck it downhill, which makes a lot more sense, especially during winter driving conditions to the Navajo Station) that means that the prevailing winds will be sending all of this uranium back on top of us Southern Utah citizens. We have already suffered enough cancer and other genetic disease thanks to the Nevada Test Site, we don't need anymore radiation in our part of the world! It is a well known, although a suppressed secret, that coal plants are not regulated for their uranium output at all. Indeed one study indicates that the average coal plant puts 3-4 times the amount of radioactive material into the air as does a modern nuclear plant of the same energy production!

Global Climate Change

First of all trucking coal is very inefficient and creates a double carbon footprint. Think about it?! It is nothing more than burning high quality fossil fuel to move very low quality fossil fuel -- absolute short-sighted, planet-raping stupidity! A single gallon of diesel can move 40 tons 40 miles by rail. The proposed coal trucks (don't forget traveling up hill) will get less than 5 miles per gallon! Apparently the parent company of this coal mine has already determined that there's not enough coal there of good enough quality to bother with putting in rails otherwise like the Navajo coal mine and Power Station they would be proposing trains as the smarter option to trucks. However I suspect that the coal company would not want to lay down tracks because they would have to pay for that construction. Instead they are choosing to profit from and exploit our hard earned tax dollars that will pay for their transportation costs by using our roads to get rich.

Do we really even need this coal as part of our energy grid at the huge expense of the carbon production created? King Coal will of course tell you yes because they have cornered the market on coal to the exclusion of wind and solar generation stations. While it maybe true that we do need oil to make our cars go, we most certainly DO NOT need coal to supply our homes and business with electricity. Our part of North America is the best imaginable location for mass solar production and the second best in the country for wind generation. Ever notice how many sunny & windy days St. George and Cedar City have? That's where our electricity should be coming from. Do an EA or EIS on that and you'll have my support.

Until then, I am bitterly opposed to the Alton Coal Mine. Please add me to the long list of fellow citizens who feel as I do.

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