



wildsight

For Immediate Release

December 5, 2008

Sad day for wildlife as Province gives BP key to the Elk Valley

Meanwhile, Shell is shutdown for two years in northwestern B.C. for further community consultation

Fernie, B.C. — The multinational oil corporation BP has been given the go-ahead to develop coalbed methane in a 300-square kilometre stretch of Rocky Mountain wilderness west of Fernie, the B.C. government announced today.

In brokering the deal with BP, the B.C. Liberals ignored concerns from the local community and the City of Fernie, who strongly oppose CBM in the the Southern Rockies region without further review. (*See backgrounder attached.*)

“The government claimed today that there is support from local governments for this tenure. The reality is the community with the most to lose, Fernie, is firmly opposed and the community furthest away and upstream, Elkford, is the only one in support,” said Casey Brennan, Wildsight’s Southern Rockies program manager.

“It is very disappointing that the Provincial government can ignore the strong message of opposition from the City of Fernie and issue BP tenure,” said Aaron Goos, City of Fernie councillor. “I will be looking to see what options are available to us at this point.”

Wildsight is frustrated after years of asking for open dialogue with the Province about the environmental costs of CBM. Wildsight contends that BP’s access to these public lands will allow a repeat performance of their already dismal environmental track record.

The granting of this tenure effectively blankets an area that has a multitude of other industrial uses already occurring or proposed. A strip mine and an underground coal mine as well as an 80 megawatt wind farm are all proposed for this same critical wildlife area without any evaluation of the cumulative effects of these industrial projects.

“The B.C. government is issuing tenure and allowing exploration for subsurface resources while ignoring the need to steward the impacts on water and wildlife,” said Brennan.

“Why have they not respected the concerns of the citizens in the Elk Valley and granted BP tenure, yet at the same time they have imposed a two-year moratorium on CBM development in northwestern B.C.? Are our concerns less valid than those in the northwest?”

Wildsight has three main concerns about BP’s tenure to this area: wildlife, water and due process. Please refer to the backgrounder attached for details on the concerns with these issues.

“This is a sad day for democracy and an even sadder day for wilderness,” Brennan said. “The provincial government is ignoring the concerns of community members and BP is now able to begin the industrialization of our wild Rocky Mountain backcountry. The B.C. government has given the keys to BP without even attempting to understand what the long term effects will be.”

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About Wildsight

Wildsight works locally, regionally and globally to protect biodiversity and encourage sustainable communities in Canada's Columbia and Southern Rocky Mountain region. This area is internationally recognized as a keystone to conservation in western North America. For more information, please visit www.wildsight.ca

Supplemental info for background:

Wildsight's Primary Concerns with BP's Mist Mountain CBM Project

1) Wildlife:

B.C.'s southern Rocky Mountains are the middle of a key wildlife corridor connecting Banff and Waterton Lakes-Glacier National Park protected areas.

BP's conceptual plan for this key wildlife area shows "nodes" and "well pads" placed on a roughly two-kilometre grid from south of Sparwood, through the Elk River drainage and down to the headwaters of the Flathead River.

Each node and well pad will be connected by a road to allow heavy trucking year round.

In essence, the development stamps an industrial footprint over the whole area; no one could design a better way to fragment wildlife if they consciously tried to do it. What we have seen from other CBM drilling operations in the region shows that well sites will be placed on flat ground in valley bottoms and on plateaus, right where the animals want to be.

"If this tenure is allowed to carry on," Brennan said, "it will have significant impact on the southern B.C. Rockies to remain a crucial wildlife corridor. It will have direct, fatal impacts on grizzlies, trout, and other sensitive species. There's no getting around it that healthy populations of these animals can't survive in habitat with this amount of fragmentation."

2) Water:

Coalbed methane is often found trapped between coal seams and ground water. To get the wells running and gas flowing, toxic water is "produced" and then drained and disposed of into underground aquifers. This "produced" water is often undrinkable and poisonous to wildlife and aquatic animals. The roads to the well pads are also bad for water. Mountainous road building cuts into steep hills, follows water courses, erodes and rutts under constant traffic and heavy rainfall and snowmelt all of which contaminates fish bearing streams with deadly sediment—severely impacting fish and fish spawning habitat.

"Take a look at BP's conceptual development map," Brennan said. "The well pads are planned to be near water—near all those little drainages that feed the Elk River. Increased sediment and lower flow rates in

these important spawning channels along with the continued impact of the five existing strip mines in the watershed could mean the eventual end of the healthy sports fishing industry that communities like Fernie rely on as part of its important tourist trade.

3) Due process:

City of Fernie unanimously opposed BP's proposal in April. This opposition was shared by countless local, provincial, federal and international organizations.

"This is a sad day for democracy and an even sadder day for wilderness," Brennan said. "The provincial government has chosen to ignore the concerns of community members and BP is now able to begin the industrialization of our wild Rocky Mountain backcountry."

Other Background Information

City of Fernie opposes BP's project.

(From www.ourfernie.com/city-fernie-resolves-oppose-bp-mist-mountain-cbm-project)

Excerpt of the resolution passed by the City of Fernie, April 14, 2008. "... Whereas the City of Fernie feels that Coal Bed Gas development is inconsistent with the leadership position of the Province with respect to the environment and climate change and will impact the Fernie area's ability to grow the tourism economy and support the Province's stated objectives of doubling tourism revenue by 2015; Therefore, be it resolved that the City of Fernie express its opposition to the granting of tenure to BP Canada and the Province of British Columbia be requested to deny tenure to BP Canada for the exploration of Coal Bed Methane in the Crowsnest Coalfield and; . . ."

BC First Nations vote unanimously for 10 year moratorium on CBM development -

<http://www.nationtalk.ca/modules/news/article.php?storyid=13729>

"The coalbed methane industry is infringing on aboriginal title and rights all over British Columbia," said Debbie Pierre, Executive Director of the Office of the Wet'suwet'en. "Our wildlife and wild salmon are threatened, and we are calling on Gordon Campbell to halt all drilling until we have a better approvals system in place."

Union of BC Municipalities opposes CBM development -

<http://ubcm.ihostez.com/content/pdfstorage/47ED112418EA4B12BBAD0E13F63E6723-2003ResFromMinutes.pdf>

Excerpt of the resolution passed by the UBCM in 2003 ".....THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Union of BC Municipalities request that the provincial government issue no further drilling licences, tenures, or other permits for coalbed methane exploration and development until local communities, their local government and First Nations are consulted and their concerns are fully considered and until adequate policies, regulations and guidelines are enacted to ensure the safe development of coalbed methane in the Province of British Columbia.

The Truth About BP's Corporate Responsibility in Colombia: Communities and Oil Workers

Speak Out - <http://www.nosweat.org.uk/node/473>

- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BP>---"In 1991 BP was cited as the most polluting company in the US based on EPA toxic release data."