



LEGISLATIVE SERVICES

TO: Council

DATE: May 11, 2021 **DIVISION:** All

FILE: N/A **APPLICATION:** N/A

SUBJECT: Letter to Government of Alberta – Consultation on 1976 Coal Development Policy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Rocky View County has received a letter from Mayor Snodgrass of High River requesting that the County ask the Government of Alberta to halt coal exploration on the Eastern Slopes of the Rockies. Since the County has received this request, the Government of Alberta has halted coal exploration in these areas; however, the County could use this as an opportunity to support High River by requesting more fulsome public consultation by the Province before making further changes to the 1976 Coal Development Policy. Administration has prepared a draft letter for Council's consideration.

ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION:

Administration recommends approval in accordance with Option #1.

BACKGROUND:

On April 19, 2021, the Reeve received a letter from High River Mayor Snodgrass, requesting that Rocky View County send a letter to Premier Kenney and Energy Minister Savage supporting the stoppage of coal exploration on the Eastern Slopes of the Rocky Mountains. On April 23, 2021, the Government of Alberta announced that they are ceasing all coal-related exploration on Category 2 lands on the Eastern Slopes.

Alberta's 1976 Coal Development Policy restricted open pit mining across much of the province's Rocky Mountains and associated foothills. It established four categories, with associated levels of protection and restrictions on exploration and development. The Coal policy generally allowed mining for thermal coal on the Prairies for electricity generation, but restricted new coal mining operations in the Rockies and foothills that often produces coking coal, used in steel manufacturing. The lands affected by this policy are divided into the following four categories:

- Category 1: All coal development forbidden (exploration and development restricted).
- Category 2: Open-pit coal mines restricted (limited exploration allowed and some mining allowed, but surface mining generally restricted – companies can apply for exemptions to restrictions).
- Category 3: Coal exploration and some development allowed.
- Category 4: Coal exploration and development allowed.

On June 1, 2020, the Government of Alberta rescinded the Coal Development Policy, which cancelled environmental protections and sparked a large public backlash. Category 1 restrictions were still in effect, but the effect of rescinding the policy was collapsing Categories 2-4 and allowing mining/exploration in sensitive Category 2 lands. This resulted in significant public pushback, and many municipalities have passed resolutions or written letters expressing concerns or asking for public consultation on the issue.

Administration Resources

Ben Manshanden, Legislative Services



On February 8, 2021, Minister Savage announced that the Government of Alberta would re-instate the 1976 Coal Development Policy, and would engage in public consultations beginning in March 2021. However, the Government of Alberta issued a number of new leases on Category 2 land in the period between June 1, 2020, and February 8, 2021, and those leases were not cancelled when the policy was re-instated. The Terms of Reference for public consultation by the newly formed Coal Policy Committee does not allow for consideration of land use, impacts of coal mining on mountain headwaters, climate change, or pollution.

The changes to the Coal Development Policy are not likely to impact the watershed in Rocky View County, as most of the lands to the west of the County are considered Category 1 lands. There may be small portions of Category 2 lands to the west of the northernmost parts of the County. The Bow and Elbow Rivers are unlikely to be impacted. However, the Red Deer and Old Man Rivers may be impacted, and the South Saskatchewan River may be impacted further downstream of the County.

The April 23, 2021, the Government of Alberta announcement cancelling exploration on Category 2 lands means that part of the request from High River has been overtaken by that event. However, the County could still support High River by sending a letter to the Government of Alberta requesting more fulsome public consultation on the environmental impacts of the proposed changes. This would have the benefit of supporting a regional neighbour, and serve to remind the Government of Alberta that fulsome public engagement is important to Alberta's citizens and municipalities.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS:

There are no budget implications at this time.

OPTIONS:

- Option #1 THAT Council supports the request made on behalf of the Town of High River, and that the letter to the Government of Alberta requesting that more fulsome public consultation be undertaken regarding on the 1976 Coal Development Policy be sent.
- Option #2 THAT alternative direction be provided.

Respectfully submitted,

Concurrence,

"Amy Zaluski"

"Kent Robinson"

Director
Legislative Services

Acting Chief Administrative Officer

BM/rp

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment 'A' – Request from Mayor Snodgrass (High River)
Attachment 'B' – Map of 1976 Coal Development Policy Land Categories
Attachment 'C' – Draft Letter to Government of Alberta re: Coal Development Policy Consultation