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Submission Text

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I'm Linda Holding from Arlee. The Tongue River Railroad is another step in the intent to move around citizen protest over continued development of coal instead of investing in renewal energy. Earlier, the Montana Legislature apportioned \$1 million to fight environmental protest for a possible coal export shipping site on the West Coast.

Railroad building and corrupt politicians was how the West was run in America. I understand all this. But hey, that was in the 1800s, and this is 2015. We now live in a transitional time in history toward renewable energy. The fundamental "hooey" proposition that Montana needs to mine this coal is based on providing construction jobs and tax revenue.

The downturn in oil price and the layoffs of workers, 9,000 by Halliburton alone, is proof that carbon-based energy companies do not provide the solid base of the economy they once did. I thank all companies for all they're providing for the economy.

The tax dollars Montana would see from Otter Creek would soon be swallowed up in the cost the state tax payers would pay to reclaim what remains in Otter Creek and the Tongue River after the coal companies leave. And leave us behind they will, that is a solid Montana tradition.

When I Googled the proposed Tongue River Railroad on Wikipedia, this is what I found: "These coal deposits are sufficiently thick, and are located under sufficiently thin overburden - that's the agricultural land - as to be economically viable. Drawbacks for production are the lack of a rail spur to transport the coal, and the lack of an established community of sufficient size to support the work force."

In other words, a railroad is being proposed for a mine that is economically viable only to the company that operates out of state and is ill-prepared to provide housing, food and other basic necessities for a workforce. A community like Ashland surely does not want to be turned into man camps, a platform for the sex trade, and limits to the roads, sewer, water and schools being compromised.

Speaking of reclamation, what does a community do after it's been invaded by a coal company and abandoned? The legislature set no money aside for the destroyed farms, ranches, and small communities around the Tongue River and Otter Creek. They pose another truly important issue to build in a railroad in the Tongue River Valley. It is the valley itself. The Tongue River Valley is one of 42 important bird areas in Montana. It is part of an international program to protect declining species of birds and their habitat.

The bottom of the valley is Whir rain forest habitat. Trees like willows, cottonwoods and ash grow there providing nesting and resting sites for over half of the bird species that traditionally nest in the state. This is why rain forest habitat itself is rare in a state that gets less than 12 inches of rainfall a year, and it's why they're so important to protect.

Coal use in the United States is in decline. If renewable energy would get the tax breaks and subsidies that coal and oil companies receive, jobs would flood the market both in construction and high-tech. President Obama has declared global warming as the most critical issue facing the world now. Not in the future, but now.

Why should the state of Montana continue to support a carbon-based energy system and increase our carbon footprint when the future is in renewables? Do not build the Tongue River Railroad, and stop expanding coal mines through our land.