

Received: 8/18/2015 4:35:16 PM

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Organization:

State: Kentucky

Agency: Surface Transportation Board

Initiative: Tongue River Railroad

Submission Text

The surface transportation board is taking comments on an Environmental Impact Study, or, in laymen's terms, a study to see how much damage to local people and the land a company seeking profits can get by with. If you want to break it down further, it becomes a matter of big company profits versus the environment, which is then played off to local people as jobs vs. the environment. I know all about it, and believe it or not, 5 years ago I was the fourth generation of my family to work in the underground coal mines in Appalachia. My father, both my grandfathers, my great grandfather and many uncles worked their lives in the mines. If there's one thing my family and many other families have learned back home, it's that coal companies are not there to create jobs. They are there to make money, and if they can find any way to cut labor costs, they'll do it. If that means busting the union, they'll do it. If that means making people work mandatory overtime to get out of hiring additional people, they'll do it. If that means funding politicians to gut workers' rights, or shaking hands with transportation board members and departments of environmental quality, they'll do it. And if that means taking their money and running when the coal markets get soft, you bet your ass they'll leave thousands of coal miners and their families without anything but broken backs and choked lungs. They've done it before and they're doing it again. Since 2012, two thirds of Kentucky's 13,000 coal miners have been laid off. That's more than 6,000 miners. Just a few months ago it was released that there is no longer a single union miner working in Kentucky, or in my home state of Virginia. For several years, Arch Coal has been selling off their assets in Appalachia and now they are trading at just 50 cents a share. Like most companies, they promise the world, but folks are finding out the hard way that it's all a bunch of lies. What I'm getting at here, is that we're talking about getting a railroad through that folks believe will create jobs and that will be a benefit to the local economy, but don't be fooled. Nothing is exact, and nothing is long term. Come to Appalachia with me. Let me show you some of the counties that used to be the nation's biggest coal producers and then I'll show you how they now rank amongst some of the poorest counties in the nation. Let me show you the unemployment rates. Then let me show you the spring my family got its water from for four generations and how it's now turned into acidic mine drainage. I'll show you what we found out...I'll show that that these companies are out to make money and to do it with as little labor cost as possible, and once they're done making their money, they'll leave everyone jobless and without any clean water to speak of. I had to move my family away from the valley we'd called home for 10 generations. Losing jobs is one thing, but losing your family's sources of clean water is a whole different story. I'd hope no one at the Surface Transportation Board would ever want to damage someone's source of water. Let me finish with this, it's beyond time for change. We're told to believe that we can't live without coal jobs, that there are no alternatives. Well I can tell you right now, just as long as you can draw a breath of air and you can use your hands, there are alternatives. Our kids deserve better than for us to believe a bunch of false promises, to let these companies keep making their fortunes off of their futures. It's time to start thinking in the long term and thinking about what this all means for our kids."