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Submission Text

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Hello everybody. Thanks for the opportunity to provide testimony on the draft EIS for the Tongue River Railroad. I'm Montana representative Mary Ann Dunwell. I represent a portion of the capital city of Helena and the city of East Helena. I live at 2520 Lookout Circle in Helena and I am a strong opponent of the draft EIS for the Tongue River Railroad. It would lead to a permit that runs counter to President Obama's clean power plan and states' responsibilities to comply with the plan to reduce polluting green house gas emissions. We need to be phasing out coal not jump starting it. This all flies in the face of state, national and global efforts to meet the challenge of climate change, our number one public health problem.

Also, the Tongue River Railroad will slice through productive ranch and farm land. Agriculture is Montana's top industry. The lives and livelihoods of countless Montanans depend on agriculture. This railroad would run roughshod over farming and ranching in favor of king coal and frankly king coal's reign is just about done. Arch Coals mine near Otter Creek doesn't even exist yet. Another thing, clean water, the very life blood of Montana farmers and ranchers, will be in jeopardy as we've heard. Sadly, this past legislative session, state legislators passed a couple of very bad bills that threaten downstream water use, all in favor of upstream Arch Coal and this Otter Creek Mine that doesn't even exist yet. It's time we need to act upstream before these laws can even benefit the cooperation and harm hard working farmers and ranchers.

Then there's the coal trains through our communities. I mentioned that I represent Helena and East Helena; coal trains cut right through both communities as it is and they already compromise the public health and safety of the residents. The Tongue River Railroad would multiply the number of trains and exponentially increase the risk to health and safety, something that draft EIS just simply leaves out in its 4000 pages.

Finally, federal action in favor of this railroad would do a great disservice to the public interest convenience and necessity. Coal has over extended its welcome in the market place. According to an article recently in the Billings Gazette by reporter Tom Lutey, "Arch Coal is about to be delisted from the New York Stock Exchange because it's consistently traded for less than a dollar a share. It's per share stock price was 45 cents recently. Arch lost 558 million dollars in 2014 and 641 million dollars in 2013, and its long term debt exceeds 5 billion dollars."

Compare that scenario with renewable energy. In the last ten years since Montana's renewable energy standard has been in effect, renewable energy has created 100 jobs a year totaling 1000 jobs, if you want to talk jobs. That job growth is expected to continue through 2020. Renewable energy has pumped 17 million dollars into the gross state product. The public interest convenience and necessity will be to explore avenues to further the development and use of renewable energy, not waste your time, our time, tax payers' money to keep coal on life support, and that's what this is. Please do not approve the draft EIS for the Tongue River Railroad. Thank you.