
Coal River mine permit appealed by wind backers

Monday, 22 Dec, 2008

It is reported that Environmental groups were appealing the Manchin administration's approval of a key permit change for a Massey Energy strip mine at a site where citizen groups are promoting alternative plans for a wind energy facility.

Lawyers for Coal River Mountain Watch and the Sierra Club were finalizing their formal appeal papers late Thursday afternoon before filing them with the state Surface Mine Board. Both groups argue the state Department of Environmental Protection wrongly approved permit revisions sought by Massey's Marfork Coal subsidiary without ensuring the changes complied with the DEP's appropriate original contour reclamation policy.

Citizen groups are opposing Massey's mining operation along Coal River Mountain ridges because they argue a windmill project would provide more long term jobs without blasting apart the hilltops and burying nearby streams.

Mr Bill Price, the Sierra Club's environmental justice coordinator in Charleston said that "It is imperative that Coal River Mountain be preserved for the future economic prosperity of this area."

He said that "If the mountain is preserved and the Coal River Mountain Wind project is allowed to develop then we are looking at good union organized jobs in an area that sorely needs an economic future beyond coal."

Earlier this month, Coal River Mountain Watch issued a report by consulting group Downstream Strategies that concluded a wind operation in the area would provide more jobs and tax revenue than a mountaintop removal mine.

Massey officials said that if environmental groups think wind projects are such a good idea they should buy land obtain permits and build such projects themselves.

Government Joe Manchin has declined to intervene in the DEP permit reviews for the Massey operation or to voice any public support for putting a wind project at the site instead. In September, Manchin aides said that the mining already had all of the required approvals but it turned out that DEP had not signed off on several permit changes and authorizations.

On November 20, Mr Charles R Grafton DEP permit supervisor signed off on one of those changes to allow Marfork to dispose of waste rock and dirt from its Bee Tree Mine on a nearby permit area to reclaim highwalls near its existing Brushy Fork impoundment.

Mr Joe Lovett, a lawyer for environmental groups said that the permit change appeared aimed at allowing Marfork to begin mining the Bee Tree site before it obtains a federal Clean Water Act permit needed if it wanted to dump that waste in an on site valley fill.

The Sierra Club and Coal River Mountain Watch plan to argue in their appeal that Marfork did not properly revise its mining and reclamation plan to meet the state's approximate original contour formula and minimize environmental damage.

For more news visit at www.steelguru.com