



COAL RIVER MOUNTAIN: DESTRUCTION STOPS HERE

Blowing up our clean energy future

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by **Nell Greenberg**

Last week, blasting began on Coal River Mountain in West Virginia. This is a part of the country where dynamite routinely goes off—turning the region's historic mountain ranges into dust for the tiny coal seams that lie beneath their surface.

But Coal River Mountain is special, or, rather, you can decide whether it becomes special. Right now, Coal River Mountain represents the best and worst our country has to offer. It is one of the most dangerous examples of blasting for dirty coal and one of the most profound examples of hope that exist in our country. It is a crossroads.



Coal River Mountain can be a wind farm that provides 85,000 households with electricity, creates 700 long-term green jobs, gives back \$1.7 million in annual county taxes and stands as a model for clean energy across coal country. Or, it can be a 6,000-acre dirty energy wasteland.

Stretching across thousands of acres of diverse and pristine hardwood forests, Coal River Mountain is one of the last intact mountains in the vicinity. It is also home to some of the few remaining headwater streams that have not been polluted with heavy metal-laden mine waste. To local residents, the mountain is a last stand.

When blasting began on Coal River Mountain this week, explosives began going off less than 100 yards from the largest coal sludge impoundment in the country. To put this in perspective, we are talking about more than eight billion gallons of coal slurry held back by an earthen dam. Were the dam to fail, and it has happened in the past, hundreds of people would have less than five minutes to save their lives.

It's unfathomable to think that there are people in Coal River Valley who went to sleep last night fearful that a tidal wave of toxic coal sludge could break down their door. Or, it should be.

But almost as hard to fathom is why any political leader paying attention would allow a coal company to obliterate intact mountain ranges, sacrifice precious drinking water or risk losing people to a tsunami of coal sludge, when the mountain could be

a wind farm instead?

Coal River Mountain's real economic worth isn't underground, but up in the sky. It is for this reason that Coal River Mountain is a major test for our country's climate and energy future. It's not that we lack alternatives to fossil fuels. It's that while our nation's leaders debate which solutions to put in place and at what rate and by what time, the fossil fuel industry continues to build more pipelines, belch out more pollution, and destroy more mountains. We are moving backwards even as we talk of a better future. But we don't have to be.

In the last several months, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has taken some good steps to curb mountaintop removal mining, largely through strict oversight of mining permits. But now it's time for leaps.

To save Coal River Mountain and preserve our nation's clean energy potential, it's critical that the Obama Administration, in particular the EPA, the Council for Environmental Quality and the Army Corps of Engineers, hear from all of us to counter the pressure that they are getting from coal lobbyists and coal industry-pocketed politicians. The Obama Administration can and will intervene if we decide that Coal River Mountain is where we draw a line in the sand.

Over the next two days, Credo Mobile, Sierra Club, NRDC, 350.org, the Center for Biological Diversity, Appalachian Voices and Rainforest Action Network among others have asked our supporters to contact those in the Obama Administration who have the power to immediately stop the blasting on Coal River Mountain and to protect our clean energy resources. With your help we can build the national outcry necessary for immediate action.

I was going to tell you that there are two important reasons to help save Coal River Mountain: because people are in danger, and because we are blowing up, literally dynamiting, one of our most promising sources of energy. But really, the most important reason for you to act is because you can. It is time stop talking about a clean energy future and start living in a clean energy present.

To help save Coal River Mountain and protect our clean energy resources visit, www.savecoalrivermountain.org.

Nell Greenberg is a communications manager at Rainforest Action Network, which helped to organize the Capitol Climate Action.