

Powder River Basin Coal Mining: Impacts and Opportunities

The Powder River Basin of Wyoming is the nation's largest coal mining area. Thirteen of the country's largest coal mines produce over 40% of the nation's coal. To top it off, coal companies want to increase production by exporting coal to feed growing Asian economies. All of this mining does not come without impacts to the land, water, air, wildlife, and people of the Powder River Basin. Here are some selected key impacts that our local communities are facing:

- **Groundwater Depletion:** Coal mining has caused complete dewatering of aquifers formerly used for drinking water and livestock watering.
- **Impacts to Land Uses:** The gap between disturbed and reclaimed lands continues to grow. Less than 4% of mined lands have been released from final bond requirements, meaning that most lands have not met regulatory requirements for re-vegetation or aquifer restoration. This lack of reclamation prevents land from being returned to its prior condition of habitat for wildlife and livestock.
- **Air Quality Impacts:** During blasting operations, coal mines emit significant amounts of toxic air pollution, contributing to regional haze and higher ozone levels. Coal haul trucks are surrounded in a cloud of air pollution that is carried by the wind to neighboring lands.
- **Climate Change:** Coal mines in the Powder River Basin are the root cause of approximately 13% of the carbon dioxide pollution in the U.S., making the mines the nation's largest single contributing factor towards climate change.
- **Coal Trains:** Coal rail lines scar landscapes and create coal dust pollution along the tracks. Sometimes coal that blows off of the rail cars combusts and starts local range fires.

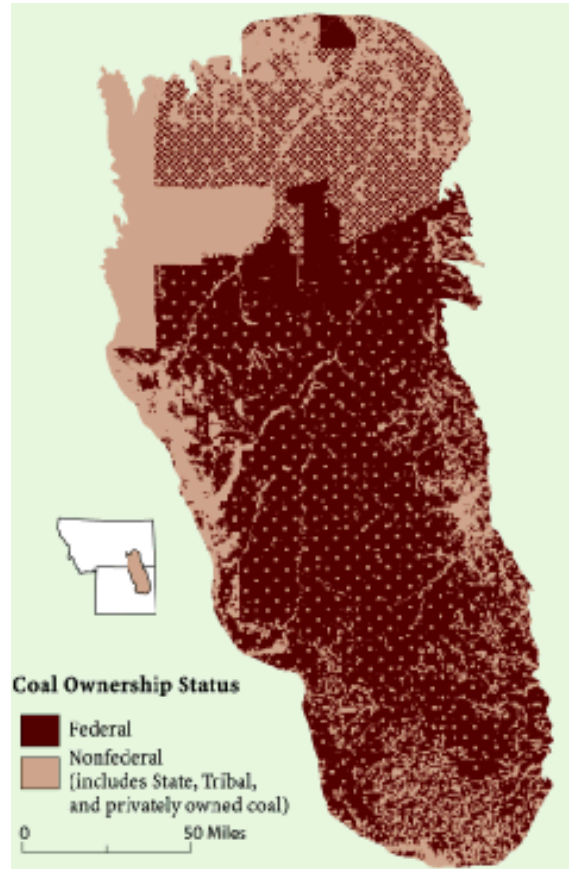


This is Our Coal: We can control the pace, scale, and impacts of coal mining

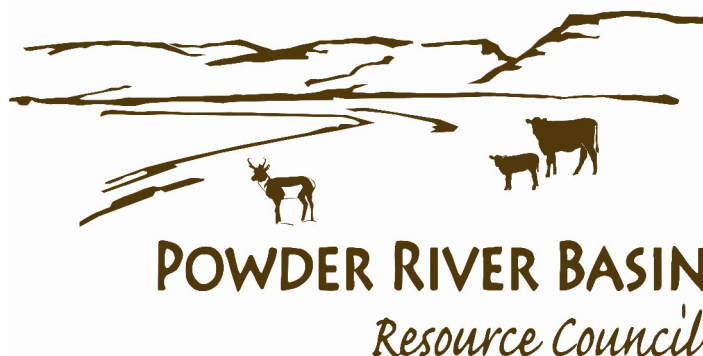
The vast majority of coal in the Powder River Basin is owned by the Federal Government. It is leased out by the Bureau of Land Management ("BLM"), an agency within the Department of Interior.

Recently, BLM's coal leasing actions have come under fire because, as opposed to having a competitive leasing market, existing mines are able to obtain a captive supply of new coal from the government at reduced prices. This limits the amount of money that is returned to federal and state governments from coal leasing. With companies looking to ship more and more Powder River Basin coal overseas to Asia, the question of whether the American public is receiving a fair return for the leasing of its coal becomes even more important.

There is gaining grassroots momentum to urge BLM to reform its leasing practices to ensure that the agency not only achieves the economic objectives of its coal leasing program, but that it also minimizes environmental harm from coal leasing and subsequent mining. We are working with a network of organizations calling on the BLM to do a better job for the public and our environment.



A critical opportunity to build public pressure on the BLM is the upcoming BLM Buffalo Field Office Resource Management Plan Revision. This plan will govern how the BLM leases and allows development of its mineral resources, including coal, for decades to come. A draft of the plan is expected in the fall of 2012, opening a ninety day public comment period. More information on the plan is available at: <http://www.blm.gov/wy/st/en/programs/Planning/rmps/buffalo.html>.



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