

CINNABAR FOUNDATION

Otter Creek Is No Longer Threatened

After years of speculation, Arch Coal officially ended its bid, on March 10, to open the largest new coal strip mine in the United States that would have affected 18,000 acres of ranch land near Ashland in southeastern Montana for export to Asia. The news prompted Anne Hedges, MEIC deputy director to announce “It’s a good day for water quality, a good day for property rights, and a great day for Montana’s future!”

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— Anne Hedges,
Deputy Director and Lead Lobbyist
Montana Environmental Information Center

The proposed Otter Creek mine would have resulted in the digging and burning of over a billion tons of coal from the Otter Creek Valley, and the release of 2.6 billion tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

Market forces have been pressuring the coal industry in recent years, and Arch Coal, along with numerous other coal mining companies, have entered bankruptcy in the last year. In a released statement, Arch Coal said it is abandoning the project because permitting is taking too long and the market for coal is uncertain. In fact, the Arch Coal mine would have weakened State water quality

standards and imperiled the economically lucrative and sustainable agriculture in the area.

Although this news was inevitable, it’s a relief that it has finally arrived. People in the area have been worried about this mine and the associated Tongue River Railroad for decades. They, along with the Northern Cheyenne Tribe, value the beautiful and life-giving Otter Creek and can now breathe a giant sigh of relief that their water, property rights, and way of life are no longer jeopardized.

Since 2010, the Cinnabar Foundation contributed financial support to MEIC and the Northern Plains Resource Council (NPRC) for their grassroots efforts to stop the Otter Creek Mine. Further, in 2012, Cinnabar recognized three Montana conservationists — ranchers Jeanie Alderson and Mark Fix, and NPRC volunteer Beth Kaeding — as *Sargent Stewardship Awardees* for their efforts to protect the Tongue River Valley and defend family agriculture, clean water, and a healthy environment against the onslaught of threats posed by the Otter Creek mine and Tongue River Railroad.

Information for this project brief was excerpted from press releases by Montana Environmental Information Center and Northern Plains Resource Council.