41% of U.S. Coal Comes From Public Lands – A Program That Needs Reforming

Over 100 people gathered at the Tennessee Theater in Knoxville, TN, on Thursday, May 26, 2016 as part of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) review of coal leasing policy on public lands. Fifty-five people spoke at the hearing with 50 advocating for clean, renewable energy.

Background
Forty one percent of U.S. coal comes from land owned by taxpayers. It’s managed by several federal agencies with BLM handling leasing and production. Coal companies pay fees to the federal government to mine the coal with 51% of the fees going to the federal government and 49% to the state where the mine is located.

In January, 2016, Sally Jewel, Secretary of the Department of Interior, announced a “pause and review” of the coal leasing program due to concern that taxpayers were not getting fair market value for the coal, that the leasing process was unfair, and that coal has a significant impact on health and global climate change.

The coal leasing rules have not been changed since the Reagan presidency. The process was unfair, and that coal has a significant impact on health and global climate change.

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global climate change.

(continued on page 8)
ARTICLE SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:
Submission Target Date is July 29 for the September/October issue.
1. E-mail and e-mail attached files are preferred. Send to c.demetreon@mchsi.com either with embedded text messages, or attached files. Attached files are preferred. Word is preferred but Apple users may send articles in Pages.
2. Photographs should be scanned in a .jpg or a .tif file format then either attached to e-mail or mailed via U.S. Postal Service on a 3 1/2" diskette or CD ROM. Please include a stamped, self-addressed envelope if you would like your diskette or photo prints returned.
3. Hard-copy handwritten or typewritten articles may be accepted; however, pre-approval from the Editor is required.
4. Any materials submitted via USPS mail will not be returned unless a stamped, self-addressed envelope is provided.
5. Concerns or complaints should be addressed to: Barbara Kelly, Communications Committee, bk1rivers@gmail.com. The opinions expressed in the Tenness-Sierran are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the Tennessee Chapter, or the Sierra Club.

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Please notify the Editor when changes are needed.

Target Date for September/October is July 29, 2016. All meetings and outings notices, articles, and photographs should be in by then.

Send material to Chris Demetreon at c.demetreon@mchsi.com.
Sierrans Round Up Allies to Defend the Smokies and Other National Parks  
by Dr. Cliff Cockerham

We had come to D.C. from all over the nation, making the case at an EPA hearing that the agency should take extra steps to protect air quality in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park along with all of the other national parks across the country. Taken together, the outpouring of support was overwhelming at the first of two public hearings on the Obama administration’s proposed Regional Haze Rule Revisions held on Thursday, May 19, 2016 at the William Jefferson Clinton East Building on Constitution Ave. in Washington, DC.

In part, I was speaking as a Tennessean about the beauty and majesty we enjoy in the Smokies, known around the world for its diversity of plant and animal life. Avash with natural beauty and home to four distinct seasons of weather, it is not surprising that this is America’s single most visited National Park. However, on this day I was also part speaking as part of a team of current and former biomedical researchers, practitioners, and physicians attesting to the fact that air quality in our national parks speak not only to the state of the parks and their visitors, but to our national commitments protecting the air quality of the nation and to some extent, the entire planet. The Sierra Club, working closely with the National Park Conservation Association and Earth Justice, brought in fellow members of Physicians for Social Responsibility from as far West as California, as far North as Maine, as far South as Texas, and as nearby as Atlanta. Against that backdrop, we strongly asserted our commonly held belief that every visitor to national parks & wilderness areas deserves to experience clean air, clear views, and the pristine beauty that we have to come to associate with some of America’s greatest national treasures. We then went on to share our deep concern that these vistas are frequently obscured by regional haze, caused by emissions from diverse fossil fuel combustion sources that are spread out over vast geographic regions.

Under the Clean Air Act (CAA), the Regional Haze Program was created to reclaim and protect clear views in national parks. Of course, we acknowledged that the Regional Haze Rule has certainly helped reduce visibility-impairing pollutants, but we also pointed to definite loopholes in the existing law and lamented that as a direct result, many of our parks are decades – if not centuries – from reaching the intended goal of clean, healthy air.

Three points, in particular were common amongst most speakers.

Point 1: The CAA in its current form is not strong enough to protect our parks and wilderness areas. “

Point 2: A proposal from the Obama Administration can change that and now is the right time to make this change, placing our parks on a more rapid path toward clean, healthy air.

Point 3: Air pollution adversely impacts the health and well-being of all our citizens, our children, our neighbors, and in altering the climate, it effects the life of the planet itself.

The primary component of the regional haze plaguing national parks and in fact, that nation, is Particulate Matter (PM) pollution released in emissions from fossil fuel combustion in motor vehicles, electric power production plants, industrial facilities, manufacturing operations, etc. These and other pollutants are linked to environmental damage, in general, and serious health problems. Nitrate and sulfate particles directly contribute to acid rain formation; making lakes, rivers, and streams unsuitable for many fish and other freshwater life. Chemical reactions in the atmosphere give rise to secondary pollutants, the most well-known being surface level ozone that forms where people can and do breathe it in at great cost to their well-being. But my greatest concern is that breathing in the very small particles give rise to respiratory illness, decreased lung function, and is even linked to premature death. Moreover, data has been rapidly accumulating over the last decade revealing that Particulate Matter (PM) pollution is associated with a much wider range of elevated disease outcomes than would seem obvious at first glance. PM2.5 refers to particulate matter with a diameter less than 2.5 microns. By comparison, a typical human hair is 100 microns in diameter. So, few are surprised to learn that PM2.5 penetrates deep into the lungs, crosses the tissue barrier into blood, and is able to inflict damage on far reaches of the human body. Not surprisingly, the main environmental cause of premature death in the U.S. is no longer related to poor sanitation and a lack of clean drinking water but is instead, attributable to air pollution exposure. A majority of medical research indicates that increased exposure to 2.5 micron PM increases mortality, morbidity, related hospital admissions, and co-morbidity. Long-term exposure to 2.5 micron PM is linked to diabetes, adverse birth outcomes, neurological development disorders, diminished cognitive function, etc. Throughout the nation, but with special concern in the Southeastern states, we are profoundly aware of the obesity epidemic and the need to promote improved health through outdoor exercise. However, we face an alarming fact given the findings of Li and others [Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health, 2015] that “...exercising in environments with high levels of air pollution can increase the risk of health problems ranging from asthma attacks (continued on page 5)
MIDDLE TENNESSEE GROUP (Knoxville)  
July 11, 2016 (Monday) - - 6:15 P.M. - ICO MEETING: Come join our Nashville Inspiring Connections Outdoors Group as we meet at the Mad Platter restaurant at 1239 6th Ave, North, Nashville. We will discuss our outings for disadvantaged kids and senior citizens, and training. Contact Craig Jervis at cjervis@comcast.net to make sure the meeting is still on. Put “ICO” in the subject line.  
July 14, 2016 (Thursday) - – 7:00 P.M. - PROGRAM: “Fly Fishing the Caney Fork River”  

Susan Thrasher will be our guest speaker. Susan is an FFF certified fly fishing enthusiast with a passion for sharing her knowledge and her skills with others. She is the owner and operator of Southern Brookies Fly Fishing located on the banks of the Caney Fork River in Lancaster, Tennessee. For more information on Southern Brookies, go to www.Southernbrookies.com. Susan’s presentation will cover scenery and wildlife along the Caney Fork River, river access points, fishing regulations, the TWRA stocking Program, places to stay close to the river, and local outfitters. This program will be held at 7:00 P.M. at Radnor Lake Visitor Center. You must enter Radnor Lake from Granny White Pike, which may involve ignoring your GPS. The program is free and open to the public.

July 19, 2016 (Tuesday) - – 6:30 P.M. - LOCAL ISSUES MEETING: Everyone is welcome at this local issues and business meeting. We are in the midst of changing our meeting location, so please contact Jim at (225) 281-4089 or jamesmredwine@gmail.com to find out where we will be meeting and to let him know that you plan to attend. Put “MTG Sierra” in the subject line. We look forward to seeing you.

August 11, 2016 (Thursday) – - 7:00 P.M. - PROGRAM: “Paddling Basics & Local Paddling Destinations!”  
Our program speaker, Michael “Smiley” King, is an advocate for a variety of paddlesport disciplines including recreational, touring, whitewater, kayak fishing, and stand up paddle boarding. Michael partners with federal, state, and local agencies, municipalities, organizations, watershed groups, clubs, manufacturers, dealers, & outfitters, to promote both paddle sports and environmental stewardship.

Michael volunteer manages Paddle Adventures Unlimited, a free meetup group with 4,300 members. Nashville’s annual Cumberland River Paddlefest (with over 2,000 attendees in 2015) is hosted by Paddle Adventures Unlimited. Michael is an advocate for increasing access to waterways, and connecting communities to the environment as stakeholders and stewards of streams. Michael is a 6th year Tennessee Scenic Rivers Association board of director’s member; ACA L2 River Kayaking Instructor; NOLS Wilderness First Aid, CPR, AED, & First Aid Certified; and a Jackson Kayak exploration team ambassador. This program will be held at 7:00 P.M. at Radnor Lake Visitor Center. You must enter Radnor Lake from Granny White Pike, which may involve ignoring your GPS. The program is free and open to the public.

August 16, 2016 (Thursday) - - 6:30 P.M. - LOCAL ISSUES MEETING: Everyone is welcome at this local issues and business meeting. We are in the midst of changing our meeting location, so please contact Jim at (225) 281-4089 or jamesmredwine@gmail.com to find out where we will be meeting and to let him know that you plan to attend. Put “MTG Sierra” in the subject line. We look forward to seeing you.

August 29, 2016 (Monday) - – 6:30 P.M. - ICO MEETING: Come join our Nashville Inspiring Connections Outdoors Group as we meet at the Mad Platter restaurant at 1239 6th Ave. North, Nashville. We will discuss our outings for disadvantaged kids and senior citizens, and training. Contact Craig Jervis at cjervis@comcast.net to make sure the meeting is still on. Put “ICO” in the subject line.  
September 8, 2016 (Thursday) - – 7:00 P.M. - PROGRAM: “Becoming a Tennessee Naturalist”  
Our program speaker, Nancy Garden, will present a program on The Tennessee Naturalist Program, which is an education training course designed to introduce the natural history of Tennessee to interested adults. Nancy will discuss how the program began, what it covers, how participants use their training, and how to participate in the program. This program will be held at 7:00 P.M. at Radnor Lake Visitor Center. You must enter Radnor Lake from Granny White Pike, which may involve ignoring your GPS. The program is free and open to the public.

September 16, 2016 (Tuesday) - - 6:30 P.M. - LOCAL ISSUES MEETING: Everyone is welcome at this local issues and business meeting. We are in the midst of changing our meeting location, so please contact Jim at (225) 281-4089 or jamesmredwine@gmail.com to find out where we will be meeting and to let him know that you plan to attend. Put “MTG Sierra” in the subject line. We look forward to seeing you.

October 3, 2016 (Monday) - – 6:30 P.M. - ICO MEETING: Come join our Nashville Inspiring Connections Outdoors Group as we meet at the Mad Platter restaurant at 1239 6th Ave. North, Nashville. We will discuss our outings for disadvantaged kids and senior citizens, and training. Contact Craig Jervis at cjervis@comcast.net to make sure the meeting is still on. Put “ICO” in the subject line. We look forward to seeing you.

October 13, 2016 (Thursday) - – 7:00 P.M. - PROGRAM: “Tiny Houses”  
Our program speaker, David Latimer, a Nashville native and builder, is embracing the tiny house movement. He is convincing many that living in a 300 square foot house makes sense. David will discuss this popular movement, explain the basics of transitioning to a tiny house, discuss the personal and societal benefits, and answer questions. This program will be held at 7:00 P.M. at Radnor Lake Visitor Center. You must enter Radnor Lake from Granny White Pike, which may involve ignoring your GPS. The program is free and open to the public.

October 18, 2016 (Tuesday) - – 6:30 P.M. - LOCAL ISSUES MEETING: Everyone is welcome at this local issues and business meeting. We are in the midst of changing our meeting location, so please contact Jim at (225) 281-4089 or jamesmredwine@gmail.com to find out where we will be meeting and to let him know that you plan to attend. Put “MTG Sierra” in the subject line. We look forward to seeing you.
It is important to realize that while all trips are guided by a trip leader, it is ultimately the responsibility of the individual to operate in a safe manner. To this end, the following is a list of essential items which should be included according to the particular type of outing. These are:

1. Adequate map
2. First aid kit
3. Compass
4. Rain gear
5. Extra clothing (it is a good idea to always have a wool hat)
6. Matches
7. Knife
8. Flashlight
9. Extra food, water
10. The tenth essential: You decide what is the most important thing to bring!
Pollution Threatens Summer Olympic Game

By Eleanor Ripoll

The 2016 Summer Olympics are fast approaching, and athletes, coaches, organizers, and tourists alike are preparing to descend on Rio de Janeiro in August to celebrate this age-old tradition. But as the opening ceremony draws closer, some major issues are rising to the forefront of the international community – including issues within Rio’s own Guanabara Bay, a place where long distance swimmers, rowers, and sailors will be competing in the water.

As Brazil has known for many years, the water conditions in Guanabara Bay are less than ideal. Back in 2009, when Rio was in the running to be one of the locations for the 2016 Olympic Games, Brazilian officials argued that hosting the Olympics would help to resolve the pollution and water contamination problems and pressure the country to clean up the sewage in the lakes. The Brazilian Olympics spokesperson went so far as to promise the country would remove 80 percent of the sewage from Guanabara Bay by the start of the Olympics.

Now, with only four months to go before the opening ceremony, the rowing, sailing, and long distance swim teams training in the Bay are finding out the hard way that the sewage in Guanabara Bay is still a major problem. In response to this, the Brazilian Olympics spokesperson has now said that only 65 percent of the sewage in the Bay will be able to be removed before the games begin – a drastic 15 percent drop in the last eight years. The IOC, or International Olympics Committee, has yet to comment on the situation.

To make matters worse, Guanabara Bay is used as a service center for nearby oil and gas fields and as a shipping lane for oil tankers – both parts of a destructive industry which affect everything—from wildlife to plants, from fishermen to water quality—in the Bay.

But the local fisherman have been fighting to protect the Bay and their way of life for years. Alexandre Anderson, one of these fishermen, has been calling on Brazil to stop using Guanabara Bay as a source for oil transportation. His efforts to save the Bay have led to 12 arrests and 28 lawsuits, all in the name of protecting his livelihood and stopping the toxic pollution of the Bay. But despite his best efforts, the oil shipping has persisted, and on top of the already destructive practices of the fossil fuel industry, the shipping within Guanabara Bay specifically has further complicated the sewage issues.

As a precaution for the athletes who will be competing in and around the water, both sailing and rowing coaches have asked their teams to try not to come in contact with the water, to soak any and all clothes that they wore while training in bleach, and to rinse themselves off in antibacterial mouthwash between their events to prevent any sort of illness. But despite all of the precautions, some athletes have still reported becoming sick and experiencing flu-like symptoms.

And if all of these environmental concerns weren’t enough, Brazil is currently experiencing a Zika virus epidemic. Zika, the increasingly widespread virus transmitted by mosquito bites, has been widely covered in the news as of late but still doesn’t have a cure. This increasingly serious disease could potentially put Olympians at risk, but luckily the virus has not been reported in Rio as of yet.

As the hugely popular Summer Olympic Games approach, the world will be closely watching Rio de Janeiro and the efforts of the Brazilian government to solve the pollution crisis. Millions of people will be converging on this global hotspot in mere months, and only time will tell if the city is prepared to protect and prioritize the well being of the local residents, the fishermen, and the athletes.

In New York, Clean Energy Hearings Set Stage for Renewable Energy Boom, Job Creation

New York has shown some extraordinary leadership in the Northeast over that last six months. In December 2015, Governor Cuomo directed New York’s Public Service Commission (PSC) to create a Clean Energy Standard (CES) which will require that New York power 50 percent of its electric sector with renewable energy by 2030. This goal would put the state on a path to meet its requirement to reduce climate pollution 40 percent by 2030.

Then, in early 2016, Governor Cuomo announced that New York would permanently move off coal by 2020 and create a transition plan for coal affected communities, both necessary steps in helping him achieve his 40 percent carbon reduction target while supporting a just a fair transition for workers and communities.

And lastly, in January 2016, the Commission approved the Clean Energy Fund, an over $5 billion, 10-year funding program to accelerate energy efficiency adoption and increase funding for renewable energy programs such as the Governor’s successful NY Sun program. The Commission also opened a proceeding to develop the CES program and the Commission released a white paper outlining how the CES might work. The Commission stated that a final proposal will be considered in June, a final plan decided in July and scheduled twelve public hearings across New York to hear input on the CES throughout the month of May.

Since the hearings started the Sierra Club, in collaboration with several different advocacy groups throughout the state, have been advocating for a strong, enforceable Clean Energy Standard that includes a large-scale offshore wind program along with a requirement for utilities to increase renewable purchases each year and increased investment in renewable energy to provide local, good paying jobs both up and downstate.

Let’s break down why these three priorities are important and will benefit both Governor Cuomo’s goal and New York citizens.

Ensuring offshore wind is in the Clean Energy Standard would help launch an entirely new industry. With the capacity to power millions of homes, foster diversity in renewable energy development, produce millions of dollars in economic investments and spur new economic development and manufacturing opportunities the benefits will be felt statewide. In addition to jumpstarting an New York based offshore wind industry, the Clean Energy Standard should also prioritize in-state local renewables. Increased solar, onshore wind and offshore wind will give New York the opportunity to become a regional incubator for a growing industry, all while making deep cuts in the state’s climate pollution.

Beyond establishing an enforceable yearly target for renewable energy growth, the Commission should also establish an enforceable energy efficiency targets for utilities with a requirement that at least two percent annual energy savings are achieved. Neighboring states have already surpassed this amount of annual energy savings and have significant reductions in consumer’s electricity costs. The CES should not be a route to importing already-existing hydropower from Canada. Let’s make sure our power is home grown, prioritizing local economic development within our state. Whenever possible, the CES should promote community and local ownership of renewable energy so that New Yorkers reap the full economic benefits of a clean energy economy.

By requiring utilities and public energy authorities to purchase a certain amount of renewable power each year, creating an offshore wind requirement and investing in local, renewable energy the CES will help the Governor achieve his goal of generating 50 percent of New York State’s electricity from renewables by 2030 provide jobs and cuts in electricity costs to residents and help curb climate disruption.
Interest In Electric Cars Is Rapidly Accelerating, So Why Are They Hard To Find?

By Mary Lunetta and Gina Coplon-Newfield

The first quarter of 2016 was the best ever for electric vehicle (EV) sales in the U.S., despite incredibly low gas prices. In 2013, Tesla’s Model S was named “Car of the Year” by Motor Trend. In 2011, the Chevrolet Volt won “Automobile of the Year” by Automobile Magazine and was included on Car and Driver’s “10 Best” list. That same year, Nissan’s Leaf as named “World Car of the Year” and was honored in Popular Mechanics’ 2010 “Breakthrough Awards.” I could go on, but you get the picture.

These cars are technologically very impressive, consumers are clearly interested, and the fact people can receive up to $12,500 in federal and state rebates for buying or leasing one depending on where they live and what type of plug-in they buy undoubtedly sweetens the deal.

That being said, EVs must be available all over the United States, right? Unfortunately, no. Not by a long shot.

Robert John, a retired chef living outside Austin, Texas, recently tried to test drive a Chevy Volt. When he couldn’t locate one at a local dealership, he finally called a dealer back to ask where he could go to find one. After he waited more than 20 minutes for them to check their inventory data, he was finally told there were no Volts within a thousand miles of him. When he asked why that was, the person he spoke to apologized that she could not answer his question and thought there must be a mistake with their system. It wasn’t a mistake. Right now, 26 models of plug-in electric vehicles from 17 automakers are available to be purchased or leased in California, but fewer than half of these models are available anywhere else in the nation. And Tesla stores, not adhering to the dealership model, are banned or restricted in a few dozen states, including in Connecticut where a Tesla ban was recently upheld.

And Robert isn’t alone. James in New Jersey had to travel to three different dealerships in order to find one with the Nissan LEAF in stock. He eventually had to buy his LEAF in a neighboring state. Robin Woerner was looking to test drive a Mercedes B-Class Electric Drive but was told the all-electric model is no longer available in her home state, Connecticut.

The Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) mandate, which California pioneered a few years ago and nine other states adopted (Oregon, New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Vermont, Maryland, Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut), requires automakers to sell increasing numbers of EVs in the coming years. Governors of eight of these states have committed to a combined goal of 3.3 million ZEVs on their roads by 2025.

This goal is definitely achievable, especially considering the majority of drivers in California and the northeastern states are interested in electric vehicles -- but automakers and dealers need to put greater effort into production, inventory, training, sales, and marketing in order for it to become a reality. Fortunately, among some automakers in certain areas of the country, this effort is underway and working well.

Thanks to the survey data coming in from Sierra Club’s Rev Up EVs campaign, we know that certain dealerships have plenty of EVs available for test drives and boast strong sales.

When Felipe Davila test drove a Chevy Volt this month at Courtesy Chevrolet in San Diego, he learned from Robby Holley, the sales consultant he spoke to, that the Volt is their highest selling car after the Chevy Cruz with an average of 20 to 30 Volts sold every month at their location.

“Our staff have regular monthly trainings on the Volt’s technology and maintenance,” Robby said. “I also drive one, so I can speak to customers about how great the car is as a customer myself.”

Charged magazine recently highlighted that dealerships often receive only one or two vehicles, a main reason for EV sales remaining modest. Customers need and deserve more selection.

Heath Carney, Electric Vehicle/Sustainability Manager, and John Sullivan, Dealer Principal at the Sullivan Chevrolet/Auto Group in Roseville, California, write, “At our dealerships, we have found that we need at least 10 Volts for sufficient selection, and we should have at least 20 to 30 during periods of peak demand.”

“Individual manufacturers set their own criteria and that will be unique to their dealer networks, so the inventory of electric vehicles will vary from make to make,” said Eric Cahill, who recently completed a dissertation on electric car sales at the University of California Davis.

“Automakers are barred by law from forcing vehicles on dealers, but they can encourage dealers to stock a certain number or mix of EV inventory through various financial incentives.”

Automakers are required to manufacture these cars, so if the supply is not meeting the growing demand then it’s important to understand why that is and how automakers, dealers, and government agencies can work together to effectively shift that trend and improve the EV marketplace and the consumer experience.

In addition to working with automakers to fill these gaps, it is important to clarify where EVs are available to test drive and, ideally, to be leased or purchased. That’s why the Sierra Club is interested in knowing which dealerships have these cars available and which ones don’t.

We invite you to join our Rev Up EVs campaign (http://content.sierraclub.org/evguide/rev-signup). All you need to do is call or visit a dealerships near you, test drive an EV (if they are in stock), and let us know about your experience by filling out a short survey. We’ll provide important lessons learned from the survey results to policymakers, automakers, and auto dealers.

The increased sales of electric vehicles is an important element in the fight against climate disruption and for consumer choice. Demand is beginning to increase for these cars -- but if potential buyers have to waste their time just trying to find one to test drive, then the road to fully clean transportation will be much longer than need be.
41% of U.S. Coal Comes From Public Lands – A Program That Needs Reforming

What Does the Middle Tennessee Group of the Sierra Club do?

This is a question posed throughout the year, by others, and by ourselves. Well, one thing that we’ve been doing for years, is our education program – led by our education chair, Joy Mayfield. During the month of May, I witnessed Joy’s presentations to 8 separate elementary class programs – led by our education chair, Joy Mayfield. During the month of May, I witnessed Joy’s presentations to 8 separate elementary class programs – led by our education chair, Joy Mayfield. During the month of May, I witnessed Joy’s presentations to 8 separate elementary class programs – led by our education chair, Joy Mayfield. During the month of May, I witnessed Joy’s presentations to 8 separate elementary class programs – led by our education chair, Joy Mayfield.

The Numbers

• There are 306 federal coal leases in 11 states covering over 480,000 acres.
• 85% of leased coal is from Wyoming’s Powder River Basin (TVA plants, including Kingston, burn Powder River Basin coal. There is some leased coal in KY and AL.)
• There is a 20-year supply of coal under lease now (7.75 billion recoverable tons)
• Total U.S. coal production declined 10% from 2014 to 2015 and will fall another 12% in 2016.
• U.S. coal exports declined 24% from 2014 to 2015 and will fall another 10% in 2016.
• Leased coal provides 14% of U.S. electricity.
• Leased coal is responsible for 13% of US greenhouse gas emissions.
• From 2006 -15 leased coal output was 4.3 billion tons that produced $9.55 billion in federal revenue.
• Royalties paid by coal companies (8% and 12.5% for underground and surface mined coal respectively) have not changed in 30 years.
• Offshore oil and gas royalties are 19.5%.
• Coal mining directly employed 90,000 people in 2012, but fell to 74,000 in 2014.
• There are $3.6 billion in self-bonded reclamation obligations. (Coal companies must set aside funds to repair environmental damage done as a result of mining. They are allowed to “self-bond”, meaning they control those funds. Bankruptcy puts the funds in jeopardy and potentially shifts responsibility to the public. Three of the largest U.S. coal companies have declared bankruptcy.)

The Issues

The Knoxville hearing was one of six around the country that constitute the “scoping” phase of the coal lease review. The purpose of this stage of the process is to identify issues and actions that will be included in a later Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) that will be used to determine new coal leasing policies and rules. The BLM identified issues and needed reforms to be addressed in the review:

Climate protections –
• Assess the impact that mining, burning and disposing of coal waste has on society.
• Incorporate those costs into the lease amounts coal companies pay.
• Disclose how federal coal leasing affects the amount of solar and wind generated energy that is available.
• Evaluate an alternative to coal leasing that would phase it out entirely.

Taxpayer protections –
• Increase royalty rates that have not changed in 30 years and are well below those for gas and oil leases on federal land.
• Include the external costs of using coal like the impacts on health and the environment, into the royalty rates.

Reclamation and Bonding –
• Determine whether “self-bonding” for reclamation of land is a workable system. Companies are responsible for reclaiming mined lands, but holding bonds themselves to fund reclamation puts those funds in jeopardy when companies go bankrupt. Alpha, Arch, and Peabody, three of largest coal companies in the U.S. have filed for bankruptcy. All hold unfunded self-bonding obligations.

Coal Exports –
• BLM must evaluate whether shipping our carbon emissions overseas is in the public’s best interest.

Public Comments

Speakers came not only from Knoxville and other Tennessee towns, but also from Kentucky, Alabama, Virginia, West Virginia, Washington DC and Montana. Also, representatives for Congressman Phil Roe (R-TN) and Congressman Morgan Griffith (R-VA) spoke. Roe’s spokesperson said the program was working well, that the review was unnecessary and that it was giving a fair return to the taxpayer. Griffith’s spokesperson characterized the hearing as another part of “Obama’s war on coal” and said local power companies in Griffith’s district would produce from 30% to 50% of their power from coal by 2030.

Five speakers from the public opposed the review of the federal leasing program. Fifty speakers applauded the “pause and review”.

Written comments may be sent to the BLM until July 28, 2016.

Email: BLM_WO_Coal_Program_PEIS_Comments@blm.gov

Mail: Coal Programmatic EIS Scoping Bureau of Land Management 20 M St. SE, Room 2134 LM Washington, D.C. 20003