

For Immediate Release

## **Keep Flathead Valley Wild, Agree Hunting and Conservation Groups**

*Cline Mining's Controversial Coal Project Would Span Flathead, Wigwam and Elk River Watersheds and Compromise Economic and Environmental Well-Being of Southeastern B.C.*

**FERNIE, B.C., April 18, 2006** – Leaders of hunting and conservation organizations in southeastern British Columbia declared today that the entire Flathead River watershed must remain wild and free of mining and industrialization.

The joint declaration is in response to a contentious application by Cline Mining for mountain-top mining in the Foisey Creek headwaters area of the Flathead River, within sight of Fernie's landmark Three Sisters mountain. If approved by the provincial cabinet, Cline's project would see coal stripped from the upper reaches of the Flathead watershed, hauled over the Flathead Divide to the Lodgepole Creek watershed for crushing and washing, and then trucked along Lodgepole and River Roads to a stockpile and rail loading terminal astride the Elk River at Elko.

"The proposed 50-km haul road from the mine site to the load-out near Elko could significantly impact the water quality of Lodgepole Creek and the Elk River," said David Beranek, representative of the Southern Guide-Outfitter Association. "The mountain topography would make it very difficult to prevent sedimentation of bull trout spawning beds by the continual disturbance of the road surface by heavy mine trucks. For this reason, the Cline proposal should be reviewed both by the provincial environmental assessment office and by the federal department of fisheries and oceans."

Fernie Rod and Gun Club President Maarten Hart said the wildlife-rich and remote Flathead has long been a special place for Elk Valley hunters. He urged B.C. to undertake a comprehensive socio-economic assessment of the Cline scheme. "How would another coal mine help people in the Elk Valley, where the existing operations are already scheduling shutdowns and laying off workers because of declining global demand? A new competitor would simply undercut the economic viability of our existing coal mines and the job security of our coalminers."

Casey Brennan, Wildsight program manager for mining and energy, said B.C.'s wide-open mining policy is a persistent threat to wildlife and wild lands. "The geographical reach of the Cline project shows why B.C.'s black-and-white policy of permitting mining anywhere outside of

parks and protected areas is inappropriate for ecosystems as complex and sensitive as those of the Rocky Mountains.”

Bill Hanlon, hunter and chairman of the Hornaday Wilderness Society, said conservation and hunting groups share a common fundamental objective. “As British Columbians, we have a generational duty to preserve enough natural wilderness in the Elk and Flathead Valleys to ensure a healthy future for the full range of Rocky Mountain wildlife.”

George Wilson, life member of the Fernie Rod and Gun Club, said existing land use plans are powerless to prevent the Cline project. “The Southern Rocky Mountain Management Plan addresses recreational access to provincial wild lands, but specifically allows large scale industrial projects such as the Cline Mine proposal.”

Harry Leuenberger, whose family-owned guide-outfitter tenure would be ruined by the Cline project, said residents of the Elk and Columbia Valleys are unaware of the mine’s vast geographic scale and the destructive economic and environmental consequences of the attempt to cash in on China’s immediate hunger for steel-making coal. “Is the government willing to sacrifice a 10,000-year-old ecosystem for the sake of a few years of profit for German and Japanese speculators?”

Cline is a penny-stock play backed by the German arms maker ThyssenKrupp and a Japanese mining venture called Mitsui Matsushima. The company’s application to remove a mountain overlying the Foisey Creek coal deposit is now being evaluated by the provincial environmental assessment office.

A government working committee now advising on the scope and scale of the provincial assessment includes bureaucrats and scientists nominated by B.C. and Montana, but does not have direct representation of recreation or conservation organizations. Nor does B.C. legislation give the environmental assessment office authority to reject a project. The office may merely recommend mitigation and compensation measures to the provincial cabinet. Not once in B.C. history has the cabinet rejected a project based upon the results of a provincial environmental assessment.

“This current coalescing of hunting, fishing and conservation interests recalls the unified opposition in the 1970s and 1980s to a proposal to mine coal from Cabin Creek drainage of Flathead Valley,” said Steve Thompson, Montana conservationist, elk hunter and secretary of the B.C.-Montana Flathead Coalition. The coalition was created in 1975 to fight the Cabin Creek scheme, which was abandoned after a negative assessment by the International Joint Commission, the bi-national agency that administers the 1903 Boundary Waters Treaty between Canada and the United States.

The participating groups stated that the Cline scheme is a critical test of the rigour and authenticity of B.C.'s environmental assessment process. Failure to adequately assess watershed-wide impacts on water and wildlife would justify another intervention by the International Joint Commission, they agreed.

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