

From: The Committee on Natural Resources - Minority Staff
Sent By: peter.gallagher@mail.house.gov
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The Stream Protection Rule: Protecting Much More Than Streams

Dear Colleague:

As Donald Trump and the House Republicans prepare to begin their assault on health, safety, and environmental regulations, we believe you need to know more about their likely first target, the Office of Surface Mining's Stream Protection Rule, and the biggest problem the rule addresses: the destruction caused by mountaintop removal mining.

Like the name indicates, mountaintop removal mining involves literally blasting the tops off mountains, digging out the coal, and dumping the waste rock into nearby valleys. The environmental consequences of this are severe and obvious to the naked eye. Less visible, however, is the human cost, and that cost is far more severe. Studies have found that mountaintop removal coal mining dust has led to increased rates of lung cancer, birth defects, and chronic heart, lung, and kidney diseases. People living near mountaintop removal mining sites often experience extraordinary suffering and need strong regulations to protect their health and their homes.

For example, in comments supporting a strong Stream Protection Rule, Donetta Kay Blankenship of Rawl, West Virginia, described her experience living near a mountaintop removal mine. "When I moved here in 2001," she wrote, "I would turn the water on and the way it smelled I knew there was something wrong with it – the color of it, it ruining our clothes." An overflow at a mining dam in 2009 resulted in the death of her pets and destruction of her home. "One night it just rained hard and that impoundment broke loose and it just all come down. My husband had two rooms that were added onto the garage. It just knocked them down like it was nothing. It tore up everything up against the back of our trailer. Part of the rooms, the walls and stuff, ended up leaned over against the other side of the creek."

Mrs. Blankenship also nearly lost her life shortly after moving to Rawl when her liver began failing. "What had happened, was the mining company up here - Massey Energy at the time – started putting sludge down under ground in old deep mines and it started going into everybody's wells. So my water had coal slurry in it, all these chemicals that they're supposed to clean the coal with – all that got in my water. That stuff is bad on it's own, but it interacted with a medicine I was on and that is what messed my liver up so much and almost killed me." In 2007, Mrs. Blankenship was switched to a different water supply, and her health steadily improved.

Mrs. Blankenship concluded her comments, "I'm thankful that people want to listen to me because the word needs to get out about what has been happening to so many people like me. I sit around sometimes thinking about, what if I wouldn't have been here to get the word out? I care about people and I hate to see anyone sick,

especially from something that could have been helped. I thank God that he has been with me through the times that I almost died.”

The Stream Protection Rule is not just about protecting streams, it’s about protecting people’s health. It’s about protecting people’s homes. It’s about protecting people’s lives. Congressional Republicans plan to block the rule and deregulate mountaintop removal mining. Donetta Kay Blankenship and many others like her know that their health and well-being will be further jeopardized if they succeed.

Please stand with us in fighting Republican attempts to repeal the Stream Protection Rule.

Sincerely,
Raúl M. Grijalva
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources

Alan Lowenthal
Ranking Member
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Matt Cartwright
Member of Congress

Donald S. Beyer, Jr.
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