

To: Montana State Land Board

Comments of Montana Conservation Voters

Presented by Bob Adams

December 21, 2009

Dear Governor Schweitzer and Members of the Montana State Land Board:

I am Bob Adams of Helena, speaking in behalf of Montana Conservation Voters. We are a statewide, non-partisan membership organization that works to protect air, land and water by engaging people in our democratic decision making process. We also work to inform Montana voters of the votes and decisions of elected officials regarding Montana's environment.

The Otter Creek tracts leasing decision now before you is likely the most important decision affecting Montana's environment that you will make during your tenure on this Board.

And on this issue, Montana Conservation Voters urges you to vote "NO"...do not lease these tracts. And if you are considering, at this moment, that they might be leased, then we call on you to require an EIS prepared under the Montana Environmental Policy Act, MEPA...BEFORE YOU MAKE YOUR DECISION.

It's not just a preponderance of the evidence, but "clear and convincing evidence" before you which mandates a "NO" vote on whether to lease the Otter Creek tracts. For months, now, and this morning, you've heard and read the articulate and thorough comments of experts noting the impending and irretrievable damage to water, land, air and human communities that would follow the development of the millions of tons of coal in the Otter Creek tracts. You've heard, too, from the ranchers whose livelihood has been tied to that ecosystem for generations.

Montana Conservation Voters would like to add our perspective to the issue.

First, let me observe that all of you have offered your sincere viewpoints on the relationship of environmental considerations in your decision-making process for this Board over the last few years. A common theme of your public statements, some of which were shared in meetings and in conversations with Montana Conservation Voters' leaders, has emphasized

your intent to honor environmental considerations as part of your decision-making balance.
Let me note some particulars:

GENERALLY: (On the most pressing issues facing the Board):

It's critical to elect stewards as much as fiduciaries.

LOOKING TOWARD LONG-TERM OBLIGATIONS:

Maintaining and defending conservation values are as important, and often more important, than the responsibility to provide immediate income.

ON MEPA:

All significant decisions regarding State lands need to be made through an open public process...MEPA is an important tool toward that end.

ON OTTER CREEK:

Only after a thorough and public government review...

IN CONCLUSION, Montana Conservation Voters requests:

With all these positive conservation and environmentally-minded thoughts, we respectfully submit that you, the Board, should vote "no" on the Otter Creek lease...for present and future generations of Montanans, and for the land.

Thank you, from Montana Conservation Voters.