

Coal Mining in Illinois

What is driving the current coal boom?

Illinois communities are facing an explosion of new and expanded coal mining because of:

- ⇒ Rising extraction costs in Appalachia
- ⇒ Improved air pollution control at coal fired power plants: it is now feasible to burn Illinois' relatively dirty coal
- ⇒ Anticipation that "clean coal" technology will keep coal demand high



Vigo Friendsville Mine, Mt. Carmel, Illinois

Unfortunately, the state's regulatory agencies have not held coal accountable to the same standards as they do other industrial polluters.

We see significant opportunities to lessen the damage caused by coal mining by improving both the permits and the permitting process.

How do coal mines threaten clean water?

Companies that mine coal are allowed to take the coal and leave their mess behind. Coal slurry is the waste created when a coal mine washes coal onsite. It contains harmful metals and salts that often leak into groundwater, are dumped into ditches and streams, or are injected back into the ground.

Mining companies say they follow state regulations that allow dumping of pollution. The entire truth is that state regulations set standards that the mining company must meet. The company meets these standards by diluting the slurry water. **Nonetheless, the bulk of pollution is still dumped or injected and eventually contaminates the clean water we now use.**



Polluted Creek below Industry Mine

We must demand that coal mines either use some of their profits to adequately treat their harmful waste, or coal must stay underground where it presents no threat to our waters.

Working to protect Illinois' rivers for people, fish, and wildlife.

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Illinois Mines

ROOM AND PILLAR

- ⇒ Leaves up to 60% of coal seam in place as support
- ⇒ Subsidence can occur long after mining is over
- ⇒ Surface waters may be polluted by coal wastes

LONGWALL MINES

- ⇒ Longwall machines shear off the coal seam face in 400-600ft panels; as machine advances, hydraulic supports are removed, causing land above to sink by ~6ft
- ⇒ Subsidence destroys surface drainage and damages buildings
- ⇒ Surface waters may be polluted by coal wastes

STRIP MINES

- ⇒ Hundreds of feet of plants, soil, and rock are removed to extract the coal seam below
- ⇒ Destroys surface hydrology and shallow aquifers
- ⇒ Land is "reclaimed", but even the best techniques cannot fully restore soil structure and fertility
- ⇒ Pollution may leak off-site for years after reclamation is complete

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What have we accomplished so far?

In the last few years, Prairie Rivers Network has laid the groundwork for significant progress by:

- ⇒ **Negotiating stricter water pollution permits for several coal mines**
- ⇒ Appealing water pollution permits for two new longwall mines
- ⇒ Providing technical assistance to citizen groups engaged in administrative appeals of state mining permits
- ⇒ **Developing water quality monitoring program for coalfield citizens to find and fix coal pollution**
- ⇒ Raising public awareness of the impacts coal mining has on clean water and public health
- ⇒ Adding a Coal Country Organizer to help citizen organizations opposing coal mines develop their skills and do outreach and education



Sampling downstream of coal waste site

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More Information

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What are Prairie Rivers Network's aims for the future?

In the next 3-5 years we hope to respond to the concerns of citizens from Illinois' coal country by increasing our involvement in mining and water pollution regulatory processes, citizen organizing, and reaching out to lawmakers to capitalize on our momentum and achieve bigger wins.

We want to ensure that:

- ⇒ **Citizens near coal mines and waste impoundments are aware of potential threats to water**, and are able to effectively raise concerns and have them addressed during regulatory review.
- ⇒ Coal mines comply with water pollution permits.
- ⇒ **State and federal permits for new and expanded coal mines fully implement existing laws, minimizing water pollution and damage to waterways and wetlands.**



Public meeting on proposed Sunrise Coal mine Champaign and Vermillion Counties

Prairie Rivers Network will continue to work to protect clean water and public health, focusing public attention on the chronically overlooked costs of the nation's reliance on coal-based power generation.