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Mountaintop removal ban up for vote in Tennessee

February 29, 2012 by Ken Ward Jr.



Anti-mountaintop removal activists are working overtime this week (see [here](#) and [here](#)), trying to draw attention to a vote expected in the Tennessee General Assembly on a bill called the Tennessee Scenic Vistas Protection Act. One of Earthjustice's bloggers opined:

This legislation would ensure that the most scenic vistas are protected for residents and visitors instead of being razed. ▶

The Tennessee Senate's Energy and Environment Committee will vote on the bill, determining whether it makes its way to the whole state's senate for full floor vote. If it passes, this will be the first and only mountaintop removal mining ban in any state in the U.S., setting a precedent for other Appalachian states and citizens who are coping with this abominable type of coal mining.

The legislation has received support from both [the Tennessean](#) and the Knoxville News-Sentinel, which commented:

Coal mining used to be an important industry in Tennessee, but mechanization has caused the work force to dwindle to the point that only a few hundred jobs remain. Tourism, on the other hand, is worth more than \$15 billion to the state's economy, and Tennessee's mountains are a big attraction. Hikers, hunters, horseback riders, anglers and others enjoy Tennessee's mountains and valleys.

Coal mining has already harmed the mountains. Some streams are polluted and there are areas pockmarked from poor reclamation practices in the past. The North Cumberland region has been named one of the 10 most endangered areas in the South by the Southern Environmental Law Center because of the threat of increased mining activities.

Protecting the integrity of the mountains is a key to Tennessee's future. These two efforts would allow mining where possible while preserving nature's skyline. We urge Salazar to grant the state's petition in the North Cumberland, and implore state lawmakers to pass the Tennessee Scenic Vistas Protection Act.

In 2010, Tennessee [produced just 1.8 million tons of coal](#), with 1.2 million of that coming from surface mining. One decent-sized mountaintop removal operation in West Virginia easily generates more coal than that in a year. Given that, it might have been nice if the TV ad environmental groups are running in support of this legislation (above) would have included [some Tennessee-specific numbers](#), rather than region-wide data.

For a better understanding of coal's role in Tennessee, check out [this report](#) from the good folks at Downstream Strategies.

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