



## Media Release

For Immediate Release

# Environmental Groups Praise Landmark Step Towards Responsible Coalbed Methane Development

December 9, 2008 (Vancouver) – The B.C. government has taken a landmark step in resolving concerns around coalbed methane (CBM) development, according to environmental groups.

Their comments follow the B.C. government's announcement on Friday of a two-year moratorium on CBM drilling in the Sacred Headwaters in the province's Northwest.

"Conflict around CBM is proving costly to government and industry. It's undermining investor confidence and has stopped almost every attempt to produce CBM in B.C.," says Merran Smith, Climate Director at ForestEthics. "Creating space to resolve conflict and determine where and how to proceed is the only pragmatic solution."

Due to harmful impacts on land, water and wildlife, only some CBM reserves can be developed safely. Until now, British Columbia has generally granted CBM tenures without assessing whether communities are willing to accept these impacts.

"Kudos to the government for recognizing that Northwest residents have a right to decide whether CBM development happens in their watersheds," says Eric Swanson, Corporate Campaigner at the Dogwood Initiative. "Now, we need to make sure that all B.C. communities facing CBM development can exercise the same right. Coalbed methane is a provincial issue, not just a local one."

As a next step, environmental groups are calling on the government to extend a CBM drilling moratorium province-wide in order to create space for rigorous risk assessments and community decision-making. This would include the Elk Valley, where British Petroleum was granted a new CBM tenure, also on Friday.

"Announcing BP's tenure at the same time as the Sacred Headwaters moratorium was a regrettable move: one step forward, one step back," says Casey Brennan, Southern Rockies and Flathead Program Manager at Wildsight. "Residents in the Elk Valley are very concerned that CBM could cause heavy environmental damage. Without the time and process to resolve their concerns, we could find ourselves back in conflict."

The B.C. government's announcement also made reference to new wastewater regulations that would apply to CBM development. Coalbed methane production often removes large quantities of groundwater, which can contain high concentrations of salts and heavy metals.

"We fully support the province's commitment to improving wastewater rules, especially with a time-out on contentious development," says Jaisel Vadgama, Senior Policy Analyst at the Pembina Institute. "We need both better regulations and opportunities for communities to decide whether oil and gas activities are appropriate in their area."

"Two out of three of Friday's announcements showed leadership," adds Greg Gowe, Staff Lawyer at West Coast Environmental Law. "If we move forward on a robust legal framework to address key concerns, the stalemate on CBM could be brought to an end."

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### Contact:

Merran Smith, ForestEthics: (604) 816-5636

Eric Swanson, Dogwood Initiative: (250) 858-9990

Casey Brennan, Wildsight: (250) 423-0402

Jaisel Vadgama, The Pembina Institute: (604) 992-0686

Greg Gowe, West Coast Environmental Law: (604) 601-2508