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The Campaign Against Coal

Where 'keep it in the ground'
meets 'keep the lights on'

By Elizabeth Shogren





THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST COAL

FEATURE BY
ELIZABETH
SHOGREN

*Where 'keep it in the ground'
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About a dozen local guys, several in camouflage baseball caps, are playing pool or slouching on maroon vinyl barstools in the dim light of the Popular Bar in Craig, Colorado. We're in the heart of the state's coal country, a country that feels like it's at war. Nearly everyone here on this August Monday night is a laborer, electrician or retiree from the nearby coal mines or the big coal-fired power plant at the edge of town. The loud music is punctuated by the sharp clack of pool balls.

The two clean-cut young men, whose pool game I've interrupted, at first seem willing to talk to a reporter. They've worked in both surface and underground mines, they say, and have young families to support. They explain how important coal is to their community. Then, unexpectedly, the taller one, whose T-shirt's cut-off sleeves reveal sculpted arms, erupts in anger and threatens me for invading his bar. Implausibly, he seems to want to fight a middle-aged female reporter. The photographer who accompanied me appears and deftly distracts the man.

The other miner, Nick Craig, has a compact build and short blond hair. Unruffled by his friend's hostility, this Iraq war veteran calmly explains that tempers have been short here ever since a judge threatened to shut down a nearby surface mine called Colowyo. "Coal is our life," Craig says. "You can't just turn it off. If you do, this town is dead." At another table, a big man with a grizzled goatee pauses, pool cue in hand, and declares that he'll never again drink any New Belgium beer. In fact, several local bars and restaurants are boycotting the popular Fort Collins brewery because it has donated to WildEarth Guardians.

But most of their ire is directed at Jeremy Nichols, WildEarth Guardians' climate and energy program director. Nichols has become a household name here — a rare feat for an environmentalist — since he sued the federal government for approving Colowyo's expansion without considering its impact on the climate. By doing so, he thrust Craig into the center of the struggle over the government's coal program, and made the locals painfully aware of how precarious their livelihoods are.

Nichols, 35, is among the most audacious of a small but growing group of activists determined to overhaul and eventually shut down the federal coal program to help avert a climate crisis. Some 40 percent of the coal used to generate electricity in the U.S. comes from federally owned reserves mined by private companies. The companies pay more than \$1.5 billion per year in royalties and other fees to the federal government, money that's shared with the states. Despite President Barack Obama's commitment to make the U.S. a world leader on climate change, the coal program, run by the Bureau of Land Management, has largely escaped reform. Nichols wants to expose the contradiction between the administration's climate agenda and its coal program by relentlessly attacking one mine expansion after another.

Lee Boughey, spokesman for Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, surveys Colowyo's South Taylor Pit coal mine located outside Craig, Colorado. DOUG MAYHEW



WildEarth Guardians' Jeremy Nichols poses above a coal train on the tracks that carry Powder River Basin coal through Denver.
THEO STROOMER

“The only surefire way we see to make the federal coal program consistent with our need to combat climate change is to start to keep it in the ground,” Nichols says. “We shouldn’t be authorizing any more coal mining in this day and age, with our understanding of climate change and our need to reduce greenhouse gases. The Interior Department shouldn’t be making it easier for the industry to mine and burn coal.”

There’s a clear logic to this approach: If you don’t want carbon in the air, leave the raw materials that produce it in the ground. Yet environmentalists and government agencies have so long ignored this supply-side strategy that it is considered downright radical, in the everyday sense of the word as well as its literal meaning — that is, getting at the root of the problem. For decades, environmentalists have tried to rid the air of pollution caused by fossil fuels, but they’ve always targeted combustion, working to clean up exhaust pipes or smokestacks, rather than shutting down oilfields or coal mines. The Sierra Club’s “Beyond Coal” campaign, for instance, figures it accomplishes more by closing coal-fired power plants. So it dedicates only about

\$1 million of its \$30 million annual budget to trying to keep coal in the ground, says Bruce Nilles, campaign director. Accordingly, the centerpiece of Obama’s climate agenda, his Clean Power Plan, focuses on smokestacks, with the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by an estimated 32 percent from 2005 levels by 2030.

But recently, the battle against climate change has moved up the production chain. Activists started focusing on transportation of fossil fuels, trying to halt the construction of new export terminals for coal and liquid natural gas and the Keystone XL pipeline, which would move tar sands from Alberta, Canada, to Southern U.S. refineries and ports. If you can’t get the fuel to market, why take it out of the ground? The heart of the anti-Keystone movement is the group 350.org and its founder, Bill McKibben, who told *Rolling Stone* that “effective action would require actually keeping most of the carbon the fossil-fuel industry wants to burn safely in the soil.” One study published in January in the journal *Nature* calculates that more than 80 percent of extractable coal reserves needs to stay in the ground to avoid warming Earth above pre-

industrial levels by more than 2 degrees Celsius, or 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit.

So it makes sense for the so-called War on Coal to directly target supplies. For years, Nichols had little company on this battlefield. But a string of legal victories and the success of the anti-Keystone protests have encouraged bigger environmental groups and their supporters to join in. Others remain poised in the wings. The reinforcements broaden political support for the keep-it-in-the-ground movement. And it needs it: The raw hostility and fear I encountered at Craig’s Popular Bar show that coal communities will not give up without a fight. The miners put a human face on the story, bolstering the fossil fuel industry’s considerable financial and political heft.

Still, due at least in part to Nichols’ doggedness, the Interior Department finally is grappling with the federal coal program and the way it hamstring U.S. efforts to fight climate change. Says the Sierra Club’s Nilles, “What’s exciting is there’s new momentum in an area that has seemed intractable.”

NICHOLS, A LANKY MAN with a sparse beard and glasses, spoke to me in the

brick ranch house he shares with his wife and two kids in Golden, Colorado. A native Westerner, from Boise, Idaho, he has long been passionate about preserving the region’s wild landscapes, an ideal he inherited from his father, a Bureau of Land Management engineer. Nichols dropped out of the University of Wyoming in 2000 to become an activist and protect Wyoming’s national forests from clear-cutting. Since then, he has moved from one environmental issue to another, pursuing each of his successively more ambitious goals with brash single-mindedness, another trait he inherited from his dad. One of his major successes was pushing the Environmental Protection Agency to write the first federal regulations for air pollution from natural gas drilling in 2012.

Despite his lack of formal education, Nichols has a keen grasp of environmental law and policy, which he picked up on the job after realizing how powerful federal laws can be if used aggressively. In recent years, Nichols has obsessively tracked government approval of new leases to mine fossil fuels and repeatedly sued over them.

In 2012, he learned about the proposed expansion of the West Elk Mine into the Sunset Roadless Area in western Colorado’s North Fork Valley, coincidentally home to Paonia, *High Country News’* headquarters. The mine is underground, so the expansion itself would not have too much impact on the roadless area. But nearly all underground mines must vent naturally occurring methane for safety reasons, usually through wells drilled from the surface. That would require building roads into a scenic stretch of undeveloped national forest. And the coal in the North Fork is especially rich in methane, a potent greenhouse gas, which the mine expels in large amounts directly into the air.

“That was beyond offensive to see our federal government playing a role in letting that happen,” Nichols says. “To see this kind of industrial development happening here, it got us riled up.”

Nichols was scanning a preliminary environmental assessment of the proposal when he noticed something new, an analysis of the social costs of releasing the methane into the atmosphere during mining. (The analysis did not address greenhouse gas emissions from coal combustion.) But when the final version was published in 2013, that part had vanished. “It set off our environmentalist radar,” Nichols recalls.

In its place was the kind of language the BLM often used to rationalize the omission of climate impacts: “Standardized protocols designed to measure factors that may contribute to climate change, and to quantify climatic impacts, are presently unavailable.”

WildEarth Guardians and other environmental groups sued to block the expansion, citing the disappearance of that greenhouse gas analysis, along with

several legal issues. “We were trying to throw everything at the wall to see what stuck,” Nichols says. “What stuck was climate.” U.S. District Judge R. Brooke Jackson, the same judge who handled the Colowyo case, ruled in the environmental groups’ favor. His decision hinged on the disappearance of the social cost of carbon analysis. It was “arbitrary and capricious to quantify the *benefits* of the lease modifications and then explain that a similar analysis of the *costs* was impossible when such an analysis was in fact possible and was included in an earlier draft EIS,” Jackson’s ruling states.

No one was more flabbergasted by the government’s decision to omit that analysis than the BLM economist who prepared it, David Epstein. “That was extremely frustrating to see the final analysis pulled,” says Epstein, who spoke on the record about this for the first time with *High Country News*. Epstein left the BLM last year, discouraged by his inability to effect change from the inside. Jackson’s ruling refers to Epstein by name, but until I brought the ruling to his attention, Epstein was unaware of his cameo role in the epic struggle over the coal program’s future.

Epstein’s experience reflects a larger reality: Without clear guidance from Washington, BLM officials have handled coal’s climate impacts in a helter-skelter fashion. Epstein’s analysis focused on the greenhouse gas emissions released at West Elk, in order to obtain an estimate of the economic cost of dumping methane into the atmosphere. Methane is the main component of natural gas. “As an economist, it almost personally irks me that there’s a valuable commodity or resource that’s being wasted, because that’s what happens when you’re releasing it into the environment,” he says.

Epstein, who at the time worked for the BLM’s Colorado office in Golden, remembers acting on his own without encouragement or criticism from his bosses. But both the coal industry and environmentalists saw his draft as groundbreaking and sent in hundreds of comments, either objecting to it, supporting it or arguing that it failed to go far enough. West Elk’s lawyer — apparently hoping to show how preposterous calculating the costs of emissions from coal extraction would be — argued that if the BLM was going to estimate the costs of methane emissions, it also should count the costs of all the carbon that would be released when electricity was generated from that coal — a very large number.

Epstein doesn’t know who yanked his analysis from the final draft, or why. As for the boilerplate language that replaced it, Epstein says, “It is illogical at best and possibly dishonest to persist in using that analysis.” He says BLM leaders were reluctant to move beyond business as usual, despite the fact that Obama, their boss, had set ambitious goals for reducing emissions, particularly methane. “I don’t know how to square those two points,”

Epstein says.

He left government feeling ineffectual. But his analysis empowered Nichols, giving him the hook for his first big legal victory in the effort to reform the federal coal program. Says Nichols, “That somebody within the agency was honest and willing to put their integrity first like that was huge.”

THE COAL-FIRED POWER PLANT pictured on Craig’s welcome sign shows how central coal is to the identity of this town of 9,000 in the state’s northwest corner. Craig was hardly a dot on the map when the big surface mines started pulling millions of tons of federal coal out of the ground; first Trapper in 1954, then Colowyo in 1978. A large underground mine, Peabody’s Twentymile, opened nearby in 1983. The mines feed Craig Power Station and the smaller Hayden Generating Station, and ship coal as far away as Florida.

Colowyo, 26 miles south of Craig, is central to the area’s long romance with the federal coal program. Mine manager Chris McCourt drives me to the edge of the enormous pit, 1,000 acres across and 450 feet deep. Glistening black coal lies in bands between layers of gray rock. From up here, the steady stream of coal-hauling vehicles look like tiny matchbox trucks. But the tires alone are twice as tall as I am. Each truck carries 200 or more tons of coal.

The mine’s coal provides enough electricity to supply more than a half million homes. Colowyo and other local mines together employ about 1,000 people, and the power plants another 570, according to the Economic Development Council of Colorado. Many other jobs in the region depend at least partly on the industry. Tri-State, Colowyo’s owner, pays about \$12 million in federal royalties and local and state taxes each year.

For several months this year, that all seemed imperiled by Nichols’ most significant triumph yet. In May, Judge Jackson gave the Interior Department 120 days to rectify its failure to analyze not just the emissions from the mining, but also the impacts of the greenhouse gases and other pollution that would be caused by burning its coal. Without such an analysis, the mine would be forced to shut down.

It was a big victory for Nichols, but one that revealed a major obstacle for the keep-it-in-the-ground campaign: The blunt economic blow its success would deal to mining communities. Pollution-control efforts rarely cause such clear-cut economic harm, and in fact, sometimes do the opposite. Getting automakers to install catalytic converters in vehicles created an entirely new industry, and plenty of jobs. Cutting power plant emissions requires installing pollution-control devices, for example, or building a natural gas-fired unit to replace a coal-burning one. But shutting down a coal mine eliminates jobs directly, first in the mines and then all down the industrial chain that

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—Jeremy Nichols, climate and energy program director for WildEarth Guardians



relies on the coal, from railroads to power plants. And that, in turn, makes the anti-coal activists seem like insensitive foes of working-class people. Western communities are used to hardrock-mining and petroleum busts, but the coal reserves are so huge that those mining jobs had seemed permanent.

The judge's ruling stunned Craig. "We were just flabbergasted," says Nick Davis, a lab technician at Colowyo. Davis, his wife and two sons had just moved from a singlewide trailer into their dream house when they heard about it. Now, he fears for his job. Davis knew that cheap natural gas and Obama's new air pollution regulations for coal-fired power plants were reducing demand for coal nationally. But he hoped that Colowyo, which has a long-term contract with Craig Power Station, would be immune. An EPA official came to town last fall and assured local people that coal would have a place under the Clean Power Plan, which gives states wide leeway to craft plans to reduce emissions — the agency projects that 27 percent of the nation's electricity still will come from coal in 2030, down from 39 percent in 2014. But the judge's ruling threw all that into doubt.

In July, even as Craig was reeling and its citizens garnering sympathy from the national media, Nichols was quoted as saying, "My initial reaction is, 'Tough shit.'" He says he was not dismissing the plight of the people of Craig, but rather referring to local politicians who criticized the Interior Department for not appealing the ruling. Still, the comment reinforced the notion that this was a battle between environmentalists who love nature more than humans, and an industry that has long provided stable, high-paying jobs to American workers.

Colorado Sen. Michael Bennet and Gov. John Hickenlooper, both Democrats, sided with the mineworkers, urging Interior Secretary Sally Jewell to do everything in her power to keep the mine open. The Office of Surface Mining went into overdrive to fulfill the judge's ruling and issue a new environmental assessment before a September deadline. The government concluded that burning Colowyo coal to generate electricity would release about 9 million metric tons of greenhouse gases a year. But it also said that would have an insignificant environmental impact, because that pollution would be a fraction of 1 percent of global emissions. Nichols may have raised the bar for environmental assessments, but the coal will keep coming out of the ground, and the carbon will keep going into the atmosphere.

Despite the reprieve, Craig remains on edge. "What could be down the road? It's a scary time," says Davis.

AND IT MAY BE GETTING SCARIER. In a major energy address in March, Jewell promised to begin more thoroughly weighing the climate impacts of drilling and mining. "Helping our nation cut carbon pollution," she said, "should inform

our decisions about where we develop, how we develop and what we develop." This summer, she launched a national listening session on the future of the coal program, asking whether Americans should get more return for federal coal. But there's a bigger question as well: How do we manage our coal program in a way that is consistent with our climate change objectives?

Meanwhile, the Interior Department has repeatedly defended its coal program. This summer, it defeated a lawsuit aimed at making it assess the cumulative climate impacts of its coal program. Later, it prevailed against another suit that would have forced the government to quantify the climate costs of massive new leases at two Powder River Basin mines that are among the world's largest.

The administration's lack of resolve has created confusion for frontline officials at Interior and in the Forest Service. Jim Bedwell, director of recreation, lands and minerals for the Forest Service Rocky Mountain region, was charged with assessing the greenhouse gas impacts and social cost of carbon of the West Elk mine expansion following Nichols' successful lawsuit. Yet "there's no uniform methodology" for doing so, he says.

Bob Abbey, who headed the BLM from 2009 to 2012, says the White House Council on Environmental Quality has failed to provide clear guidance. In 2010 and again in 2014, the council released drafts on how all agencies should calculate the effects of greenhouse gas emissions and climate change when conducting environmental reviews, but the White House office has yet to produce a final document. In the meantime, each BLM field office improvises its own approach. This is true for oil and gas leases as well as coal. "I think that has led to this inconsistency that is not beneficial to anyone," Abbey says.

Nichols has been relentless in highlighting that inconsistency. In a protest against 2015 oil and gas lease sales in Utah, he demonstrates just how differently various BLM offices treat fossil fuels and climate change. Despite the scientific consensus on the anthropogenic causes of recent global warming, some environmental assessments from Utah BLM offices insist there is uncertainty over emissions' impact on climate. In contrast, the BLM's Four Rivers Field Office in Boise made a detailed social cost of carbon calculation for five parcels being offered for lease in Idaho.

Current top officials at BLM and Interior declined to be interviewed on the record for this story. But, speaking on background, one Interior official acknowledges the problem and, like Abbey, blames the White House: "It really has been confusing. There is no final guidance on this yet. We've been given the leeway to apply it, if and where it makes sense. But because there is no requirement to apply the social cost of carbon ... it's applied inconsistently or not at all."

Some former senior Obama adminis-

tration officials have advocated introducing new fees on federal coal: "The price for taxpayer-owned coal should reflect, in some measure, the added costs associated with the impacts of greenhouse gas emissions," former Deputy Interior Secretary David Hayes and Harvard University professor of economics James Stock, a former member of the president's Council of Economic Advisers, opined in *The New York Times* in March. In the June speech that launched her presidential campaign, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke of plans to charge new fees for fossil fuels, protect miners' pensions and create economic opportunities as coal jobs disappear.

Abbey suggests that the administration's failure to align the coal program with the president's climate agenda ultimately comes down to economics and politics: "They can say all the right things in public relative to climate change and the need to reduce dependency on fossil fuels. They're also realizing those sources of energy are very, very important to our nation's treasury."

Over the last 10 years, the federal coal program raised \$12 billion in royalties and other payments. About half of that went to the states where the mines are located, where it is used for schools and other local priorities. Industry also sways policy: Coal companies spend millions backing candidates, primarily Republicans, in every election, peaking with \$15 million in the 2012 election cycle, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. They also spend millions more every year lobbying Congress — \$17 million in 2012.

Early in the Obama administration, it looked like Congress might pass a cap-and-trade law to rein in greenhouse gas emissions nationwide. But Republicans nixed that when they took back the House in 2010. Obama vowed to use his executive authority instead. But court challenges and fervent congressional opposition threaten his biggest initiative, the Clean Power Plan. "I will tell you this: The fossil fuel industry is very powerful in this nation and throughout the world," Abbey says. "I think it's an indication that it's going to require a different type of leadership for us to get to where we need to be."

IN AUGUST, THE INTERIOR DEPARTMENT holds a listening session on the coal program in Gillette, the heart of the nation's biggest coalfield, the Powder River Basin. As a measure of how important federal coal is to Wyoming, the state's entire U.S. congressional delegation plus its governor gather in a local auditorium. Jeremy Nichols is here, too, deep in hostile territory, sitting about halfway back and listening intently.

At other listening sessions — in Montana, New Mexico, Colorado and Washington, D.C. — people have urged federal officials to raise royalty rates and give Americans their "fair share" from

publicly owned coal, which they argue is underpriced. Companies pay 12.5 percent on what they sell out of the mine — the same percentage the government gets from oil and natural gas on federal land, and far lower than what most states receive for fossil fuels on state land. Critics charge that in too many cases the coal is sold first to affiliated middlemen, who resell or export it at higher prices, thus shortchanging the government and the taxpayers. New leases are often next to existing mines, so typically just one company bids, keeping the price low. Many advocate raising royalties enough to reflect the true toll of emissions, including worsening droughts, forest fires, natural disasters, flooding and heat waves — a price high enough to keep fuels in the ground.

But in Gillette, almost everyone passionately defends the coal program. One after another, politicians, miners, school officials and locals beg Interior not to increase royalty rates or otherwise curtail it. Nichols is one of the few environmentalists present. His mission is part outreach and part opposition research. He wants to understand coal communities so he can defuse the political backlash that threatens to thwart his objective. "There are people behind what's happening here, not that we lose sight of that, but it's important (for me) to be exposed to that," he says. "It helps us in trying to figure out how do we sell a keep-it-in-the-ground message in a way that acknowledges the humanity that is affected. That's a challenge, and the only way you can do it is if you're genuine about actually listening to people."

People like Penny Russell, 46, who drives a huge coal truck. "The truly sad part is a large portion of us will lose everything for no valid reason," she says. Russell earns triple what she made in retail before starting at Cloud Peak's Cordero Rojo Mine a decade ago, enough to help her extended family. "We don't want to be forced onto welfare in Gillette. We want to work and pay our way through life without asking for government assistance." Nichols, however, remains unapologetic. He's motivated by his concern about the many ways global warming could disrupt the lives of his own children and everybody else's.

Outside, coal companies stage a rally in opposition to the Clean Power Plan, environmentalists' lawsuits and proposals to raise royalties. Richard Reavey, a vice president of Cloud Peak Energy, which mines federal coal in Wyoming, says the war on coal is about "crybaby billionaires" — major donors to environmentalist causes — getting Democratic politicians to protect their investments in renewable energy since they can't get Congress to pass a climate change law.

Although Nichols' battle began as a lonely effort, the broader environmental movement has started to join him. "Over the last two years, you've got a lot of groups that have started to engage on the

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—Penny Russell, Powder River Basin coal mine worker



Tri-State Generation and Transmission's 1,300-megawatt Craig Station power plant, top, powered by coal from the local mines, sits above Craig, Colorado. Above, Kasen Davis (front), son of Kim and Nick Davis, along with brother Chad, in their new home, purchased just before a lawsuit was brought against the Colowyo Mine where Nick works as a lab technician. At right, Craig Power Station employee Craig Hagar shoots pool at the Popular Bar.

DOUG MAYHEW





A dragline excavator piles coal in the Black Thunder Mine — which sold more than 100 million tons of coal in 2014 — in Wyoming's Powder River Basin. EVAN ANDERMAN

supply side of the climate fight,” says Nathaniel Shoaff, a Sierra Club lawyer and occasional partner with Nichols in lawsuits against the federal coal program.

Microsoft-cofounder and philanthropist Paul Allen bankrolled a lawsuit in November 2014, challenging the Interior Department to assess the cumulative climate effects of the entire federal coal program. In late August, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia sided with the administration and dismissed the case. But the plaintiffs, Western Organization of Resource Councils and Friends of the Earth, filed an appeal.

In August, Nichols lost what was arguably his biggest case. WildEarth Guardians and the Sierra Club had challenged big lease sales at the Black Thunder and North Antelope Rochelle mines, both in Wyoming's Powder River Basin. The Obama administration argued that even such massive leases would have no significant impact on the climate, and the judge, a Reagan appointee, agreed. Meanwhile, the BLM's Buffalo field office authorized the leasing and mining of 10 billion tons of coal from the Powder River Basin over the next two decades without weighing the costs of the pollution that would result, or considering options that would keep some of that coal in the ground. BLM officials say their decisions are justified by their court wins and the importance of federal coal, especially to

Wyoming, where it brings in several hundred million dollars in revenue a year, a large portion of the state budget. “It’s a very large monetary issue for the state of Wyoming,” says Duane Spencer, who manages the BLM's Buffalo field office.

But Nichols remains undaunted. This fall, he and other groups won a case involving a large surface mine in Montana, when U.S. District Court Judge Dana L. Christensen ruled that Interior failed to consider environmental impacts when it OK'd mining. Nichols and the Sierra Club appealed the Wyoming ruling, and he's optimistic about an ongoing case in New Mexico. His group also challenged another mine expansion, this one in Utah, and filed a sweeping case targeting mines in Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico and accusing the federal government of violating the law by failing to consider their cumulative climate change impact. “We’re in the courtroom, we’re scrapping it up and being adversarial,” he says. He's convinced that if the federal government is forced to scrutinize the true environmental costs, it inevitably will conclude that mining the public's coal is not in the public interest.

That is unlikely under the current regime, however. Jewell told reporters this fall that the administration may rewrite rules to give Americans a bigger take from the coal program. But she won't add a price to federal coal to reflect climate

change, nor will she keep federal fossil fuels in the ground. “There are millions of jobs around the country that are dependent on these industries, and you can't just cut it off overnight and expect to have an economy that is in fact the leader in the world,” Jewell said at a *Christian Science Monitor* breakfast in Washington. “It oversimplifies a very complex situation to suggest one could simply cut off leasing or drilling on public lands and solve the issue of climate change.”

In late September, Nichols took a rare trip to Washington to rally with activists from Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, 350.org and other groups outside the White House. They delivered a letter for Obama, signed by scores of organizations, which called on him to keep federal fossil fuels on the ground.

I met Nichols in a park outside the Interior Department headquarters. He had just come from a meeting with senior Interior officials and was still wearing a suit. He said little about the meeting, but was clearly elated that his once-lonely crusade had attracted support and given him entrée into the halls of power in Washington. “The Interior Department has finally acknowledged, OK, something needs to be fixed here,” Nichols said. “We have a window of opportunity to get something that's pretty big — something that puts the federal coal program on the path towards keeping it in the ground.” □



Correspondent Elizabeth Shogren writes *HCN's* DC Dispatches from Washington. @ShogrenE

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