**Draft letter to Minister of the Environment & Parks, Jason Nixon**

Dear Minister Nixon:

I am writing to express my concerns about the threats to Big Hill Springs Provincial Park resulting from the Mountain Ash Summit gravel pit that proposes to commence open pit mining adjacent to the Park.

As the Minister responsible for protecting both Alberta’s environment and its parks, it is essential that you ensure that this gravel pit does not receive the regulatory approval necessary for it to begin operations.  AEP staff have received an independent scientific study that clearly demonstrates that this proposed gravel pit poses significant risks to the aquifer supplying the headwaters of Big Hill Springs.  These risks cannot be effectively mitigated if the pit operates as planned.  AEP staff have also been informed that the gravel company itself has done no technical evaluation of its operations on the water quality of Big Hill Springs.  Instead, Mountain Ash simply asserts, without evidence, that there will be no impact.

Big Hill Springs is a nationally significant, year-round spring that supports unique tufa formations and vegetation communities as well as providing critical wildlife habitat, including habitat for species at risk.  The associated Provincial Park is one of the most popular provincial parks in Alberta.  It attracts over 250,000 visitors annually. Your Ministry has just invested a substantial sum to upgrade the Park.   If Big Hill Springs’ water source is contaminated by gravel operations, all of this will be destroyed.

As the independent study referred to above emphasizes, gravel extraction threatens the water quality of the Springs, Big Hill Creek, and subsequently the Bow River.  The magnitude of the risks posed by Mountain Ash’s Summit gravel pit are too severe to permit this gravel pit to operate under a regulatory system that assumes potential damage can be mitigated and/or rectified.  Once the aquifer is contaminated, it is not possible to reverse that damage – mitigation is not an option.  As a result, it is essential that AEP recognizes that this is a sufficiently environmentally sensitive location that it is simply not suitable for gravel extraction.

I look forward to hearing that your Ministry will stop the threat Mountain Ash’s Summit pit poses to the unique and sensitive environment in Big Hill Springs Provincial Park and to the Park’s continued existence as an extremely popular tourist attraction.

Yours sincerely,

*Insert name and address*

Letter to be sent to – Minister of Environment & Parks, Jason Nixon: aep.minister@gov.ab.ca

Copies to be sent to

– local MLA, Peter Guthrie: airdrie.cochrane@assembly.ab.ca