

Chris Davenport
Climate, Methane Testimony

As a professional skier, it is not hard to see the threat that climate change poses on the future of snowsports. Snowpack is confined to the highest elevations. What should be falling as snow is in fact falling as rain. Our seasons are noticeably shorter. I know that if we don't act now to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we will see the end of winter as we know it. I hope that by speaking out for what I care about, policy makers and outdoor enthusiasts alike will listen and take action.

A recent EPA study on climate change suggests a grim future for ski resorts, with season length reductions up to 80% by 2090. As a father of three young boys, that means that my grandkids will not experience winter as I have. This is not an issue too far in the future to comprehend. Sadly, not having power days will be the very least of our worries. We need a healthy snowpack for ample quantities of water, and we need water to survive.

I've spoken out against the West Elk Coal Mine's proposed expansion- giving Arch Coal access to an additional seventeen million tons of coal-- as it will undoubtedly impact our climate as coal mines are major methane emitters. In fact, from 2013 to 2015, the West Elk Mine was the single largest industrial source of methane pollution in Colorado. Methane is an immensely potent greenhouse gas driving climate change, far more powerful than carbon dioxide. Back in 2014, Colorado actually became the first state in the US to limit methane emissions from oil and gas operations, which is great. But, what good does that landmark rule do us if coal mines are wiping out a significant amount of the benefit?

Unfortunately, it's not just about methane. I also oppose this mine because it uses our nation's public lands-- your public lands-- for industrial fossil fuel development. Under Arch Coal's plan, more than six miles of roads will be bulldozed and more than 48 drilling pads will be built in the Sunset Roadless Area. Adjacent to this area is the West Elk Wilderness, which I've explored on skis. As a Snowmass resident, this is my backyard. From the Castles to the Baldys to the Beckwith mountains, this land offers prime backcountry recreation opportunities, from hiking to hunting. And personally, I'd prefer the views to be of forests, ridgelines, and wildlife, not of a climate-wrecking methane bomb, threatening the very future of our sport. These are the very issues that compel me to speak up and use my influence as a professional athlete. Today, I'm asking Governor Hickenlooper to step up and tell our federal government that this mine expansion is not a good investment for Colorado.

Chris Davenport is a professional skier from Snowmass, Colorado. He is widely regarded as one of the world's most accomplished big-mountain skiers, and he is a Board Member of Protect Our Winters.