

IC 32-23-12

Chapter 12. Coal: Estates in Land

IC 32-23-12-1

Exemptions from chapter

Sec. 1. This chapter does not do the following:

- (1) Provide an exclusive basis by which a joint owner in coal or a lessee of the coal owner may enjoy their estate in the coal land.
- (2) Diminish the rights of a joint owner of coal or a lessee of the coal owner under common law.
- (3) Diminish the appurtenant rights of a coal owner.
- (4) Prohibit a joint owner from filing a petition for partition under IC 32-17-4, provided that the petition for partition is filed in accordance with and subject to IC 32-23-12-9(d).
- (5) Prohibit any entity with eminent domain powers from acquiring all or a portion of the coal land by exercise of eminent domain powers.

As added by P.L.94-2009, SEC.1.

IC 32-23-12-2

"Coal land"

Sec. 2. As used in this chapter, "coal land" means the coal estate in land that contains coal and is subject to a vested interest by a plaintiff, under this chapter, to the coal lying within the land.

As added by P.L.94-2009, SEC.1.

IC 32-23-12-3

"Coal owner"

Sec. 3. As used in this chapter, "coal owner" means a person vested with an undivided fractional fee simple interest or other freehold interest in coal contained within the coal land. However, the term does not include a person with only a leasehold, easement, or right-of-way interest in the coal land.

As added by P.L.94-2009, SEC.1.

IC 32-23-12-4

"Joint owner"

Sec. 4. As used in this chapter, "joint owner" means a person who is a joint tenant, a tenant in common, a tenant by the entirety, or other person who is a coal owner of less than one hundred percent (100%) of an undivided interest in all the coal within the coal land that is sought to be developed.

As added by P.L.94-2009, SEC.1.

IC 32-23-12-5

Court proceedings

Sec. 5. A proceeding under this chapter must be brought in the

circuit or superior court of the county:

- (1) where the coal land sought to be affected is entirely located;
- or
- (2) if the coal land is located in more than one (1) county, the county where the major part of the coal land is located.

As added by P.L.94-2009, SEC.1.

IC 32-23-12-6

Authority to remove coal; authority of court; length of lease

Sec. 6. (a) If the title to coal lying within the land is owned by joint owners, a coal owner or coal lessee of the coal owner that meets the requirements under this chapter is authorized to mine and remove coal from the land subject to this chapter.

(b) The circuit or superior court of the county in which the coal land or the major part of the coal land lies may:

- (1) declare a trust in the coal land;
- (2) appoint without a bond a trustee for all persons owning an interest in the coal land who are not plaintiffs or the lessor of the plaintiffs under a valid and subsisting coal lease; and
- (3) authorize the trustee to sell, execute, and deliver a valid lease on the coal land on behalf of each defendant on terms and conditions approved by the circuit court as provided in this chapter.

(c) A lease created under this chapter continues after the termination of the trust, unless the lease has expired by its own terms.

As added by P.L.94-2009, SEC.1.

IC 32-23-12-7

Appointment of trustee

Sec. 7. Proceedings for the appointment of a trustee may be instituted by any person who is:

- (1) a coal owner of the coal sought to be developed; or
- (2) vested with a valid and subsisting coal lease, if the lessor is a person described in subdivision (1).

As added by P.L.94-2009, SEC.1.

IC 32-23-12-8

Creation of trust to develop coal interest; petition; guardian ad litem; evidence; coal lease; fees

Sec. 8. (a) The person seeking to create a trust for an interest in coal land for the purpose of leasing and developing the coal interest shall join as a defendant each person who has a legal interest in the coal land, except for any plaintiffs or persons having a legal interest in the coal land who at the time of the action are parties to a valid and existing lease granting to the plaintiff the mining rights sought by the plaintiff. A person who might have a contingent or future interest in the coal land is bound by the judgment entered in the proceedings.

(b) The plaintiff shall file a verified petition that specifically sets forth the following:

(1) The request of each plaintiff that a trustee be appointed to execute a lease granting the plaintiff the right to mine and remove coal from the subject coal land.

(2) The legal description of the coal land.

(3) The interest of the plaintiff in the coal within the coal land.

(4) The apparent interest of each defendant in the coal within the coal land.

(5) A statement that the plaintiff is willing to purchase a mineral lease covering the interest of each defendant and that the existence of these unleased mineral interests is detrimental to and impairs the enjoyment of the interest of the plaintiff.

(c) The Indiana rules of trial procedure govern an action under this chapter to make an unknown party a defendant.

(d) The court shall appoint a guardian ad litem for any defendant to the proceeding who is a ward of the state or a ward to another person.

(e) If it appears to the court that a person who is not in being, but upon coming into being, is or may be entitled to any interest in the property sought to be leased, the court shall appoint a guardian ad litem to appear for and represent the interest in the proceeding and to defend the proceeding on behalf of the person not in being. A judgment or order entered by the circuit court in the proceeding is effective against the person not in being.

(f) The court shall receive evidence and hear testimony concerning:

(1) the matters in the plaintiff's petition; and

(2) the prevailing terms of similar coal leases obtained in the vicinity of the coal land in the petition, including the length of the lease term, bonus money, delay rentals, royalty rates, and other forms of lease payments.

If, upon taking evidence and hearing testimony, the court determines that the material allegations of the petition are true and that there has been compliance with the required notice provisions, the court shall enter an order determining the interest of each defendant in the coal land sought to be leased. The court shall also appoint a trustee for the purpose of executing in favor of the plaintiff a coal lease covering the interest of each defendant. The court's judgment appointing the trustee and authorizing the execution of the lease must specify the minimum terms that may be accepted by the trustee. Those terms must be substantially consistent with the terms of other similar coal leases obtained in the vicinity as determined by the court. The terms of the coal lease also must be substantially consistent with the terms of other existing leases, if any, covering the remaining coal interests in the land described in the petition.

(g) The coal land to be covered by a coal lease must be contiguous. To the extent that any of the coal land described in the petition is not contiguous to other coal land in the petition, that coal land must be subject to separate coal leases.

(h) The court shall determine a reasonable fee to be paid to the

trustee and the trustee's reasonable attorney's fees and costs of the proceeding, which shall be paid by the plaintiff.

(i) Each plaintiff shall promptly furnish to the court a report of proceedings of the evidence received and testimony taken at the hearing on the petition. The report of proceedings shall be filed and made a part of the case record.

(j) In proceedings under this chapter, the circuit or superior court may:

- (1) investigate and determine questions of conflicting or controverted titles;
- (2) remove invalid and inapplicable encumbrances from the title to the coal land; and
- (3) establish and confirm the title to the coal or the right to mine and remove coal from any of the coal land.

As added by P.L.94-2009, SEC.1.

IC 32-23-12-9

Duties of trustee; review of lease; petition for partition

Sec. 9. (a) The trustee shall:

- (1) enter into negotiations with the plaintiff;
- (2) execute a coal lease in favor of the plaintiff covering the interest of the defendant that reflects the findings and judgment of the circuit or superior court; and
- (3) promptly prepare and file a report of the coal lease stating the terms of the lease and the payments received for the lease and give notice to all parties appearing of record.

(b) The circuit or superior court shall review the coal lease under subsection (a) to determine if the sale is in accordance with the court's findings and judgment. If the circuit or superior court approves the sale of the coal lease, the court shall:

- (1) issue an order confirming the sale; and
- (2) issue an order terminating the trust.

(c) If, before an order confirming the lease pursuant to subsection (b) is issued, a party to the proceedings files, in accordance with subsection (d), a petition for partition under IC 32-17-4 applicable to the coal land, whether solely for the coal estate or for estates in the subject land in addition to and including the coal estate, the proceedings under this chapter shall be stayed during the pendency of the proceeding initiated under IC 32-17-4, and upon any final order of partition or sale in that proceeding, the proceedings under this chapter shall be terminated.

(d) Any petition for partition under IC 32-17-4 applicable to the coal land filed during the pendency of any petition filed under this chapter shall be filed in the same court exercising jurisdiction over the petition filed under this chapter. If any defendant in a proceeding under this chapter files during the pendency of any proceeding under this chapter a petition for partition under IC 32-17-4 applicable to the coal land, and the petition for partition is subsequently dismissed or terminated prior to a final order of partition or sale, the same

defendant may not refile a subsequent petition for partition applicable to the coal land under IC 32-17-4 until the proceedings under this chapter are concluded.

(e) If a petition for partition is filed under IC 32-17-4 after an order confirming a lease pursuant to subsection (b) has been issued, any land partitioned or sold shall be partitioned or sold subject to the lease.

As added by P.L.94-2009, SEC.1.

IC 32-23-12-10

Lease payments

Sec. 10. Any payment that is owed to a defendant under a coal lease executed by the trustee must be paid by the plaintiff directly to the defendant.

As added by P.L.94-2009, SEC.1.

IC 32-23-12-11

Sale and execution of coal lease

Sec. 11. The sale of and execution of any coal lease under this chapter is binding concerning the interest in the coal and the right to mine and remove the coal owned by any defendant to the action in the same manner as if the defendant had personally signed and delivered the lease. The coal lease is binding on the heirs, legatees, personal representatives, successors, and assigns of the defendant.

As added by P.L.94-2009, SEC.1.

IC 32-23-12-12

Successor trustee; subsequent proceedings

Sec. 12. (a) If a trustee:

- (1) dies or resigns; or
- (2) refuses or is unable to act;

the circuit or superior court shall, upon either the court's motion or the motion of a plaintiff, appoint a successor trustee.

(b) After the entry of the initial judgment authorizing a lease, all subsequent proceedings pertaining to the coal land and the coal interest involved in the initial litigation, including subsequent leasing proceedings or proceedings by the trustee requesting authority to execute and deliver additional documents pertaining to a coal lease, must be commenced in the same court as the proceedings for the initial lease. The acting trustee at the time of any subsequent proceedings shall act as the trustee in the subsequent proceedings. The circuit or superior court retains continuing jurisdiction over any subsequent proceedings.

As added by P.L.94-2009, SEC.1.

IC 32-23-12-13

Court costs

Sec. 13. The court costs related to the proceedings allowed under this chapter must be paid by the plaintiff.

As added by P.L.94-2009, SEC.1.

IC 32-23-12-14

Conveying marketable title of lease

Sec. 14. This chapter shall be liberally construed so that any lease issued under this chapter conveys marketable title.

As added by P.L.94-2009, SEC.1.