

TELLURIDE DAILY PLANET

NEWS

Across region, uranium issues mount

Mine plans near Colorado border challenged

By **Matthew Beaudin**
Editor

Published: Tuesday, August 3, 2010 6:10 AM CDT

Print Page

As the prospect of renewed uranium mining in the West advances, environmental groups are pushing back.

Here in Telluride, the environmentalist group Sheep Mountain Alliance has taken up arms against a proposed mill just outside of Paradox, Colo., a small town in a big valley near the Utah border.

And just over that border, a host of environmental groups filed a suit in federal court that would halt further uranium exploration in the La Sal, Utah, area, in addition to putting the breaks on more vent holes at ground level for the underground mines.

The complaint comes from Uranium Watch, the Center for Water Advocacy and Living Rivers, all conservation groups based in nearby Moab, Utah. The suit, filed in U.S. District Court last week, challenges a "categorical exclusion" through which the Moab/Monticello Ranger District permitted 16 exploration holes and two radon vent holes.

The expanded operations are part of Denison Mines Corporation's existing Pandora Mine. Ore from that site is transported to Denison's mill on White Mesa, located a few miles south of Blanding, Utah.

The groups challenge the conduit through which the ranger district permitted the expanded operations; "categorical exclusion" permits require lighter environmental reviews, they say.

According to the groups, the mine is operating under an "outdated" plan from 1981. "The Forest Service should not approve any expansion of the mine until there is a fully updated plan of operations," said Sarah Fields, Uranium Watch program director, in a press release.

Radon is vented to the surface from underground mining so that miners won't inhale the toxic gas and radioactive particles produced when radon decays.

The conservation groups ascertain that the vent holes, while moving the gas from the underground mines, will pipe it too close to the small town of La Sal, on the south slope of the La Sal mountains.

In 2009, the amount of radon released from the mines around La Sal went from 300 Curies (a metric for radioactivity) to more than 4,500, according to Denison's yearly reports to the Utah Division of Air Quality. According to a document from Uranium Watch, the gas is released from vents "not far from the La Sal Elementary School."

Copyright © 2010 - Telluride Daily Planet

[\[x\] Close Window](#)