



Uranium mill proposed for Colo.

by [Sandy Shore](#) - Aug. 12, 2008 12:00 AM
Associated Press

DENVER - Cattleman George Glasier sees the next nuclear era amid the blood-orange mesas of Paradox Valley, the same Western rangelands that hold a darker legacy from the last rush to pull uranium from the ground.

He and others like him are giving residents of this valley near the Four Corners region an unimpeded view of the second uranium rush. Many are worried.

Glasier, a one-time mining executive, wants to build a uranium mill on cattle-grazing land near his spread. It would be the country's first in decades.

The land is not far from the toxic uranium mines, now mostly abandoned, that serve as a reminder of an industry born of the Cold War.

As the third global energy shock begins to drastically alter national economies, a potential shift in U.S. energy policy has moved to the forefront of the upcoming presidential election.

Barack Obama and John McCain are crossing the country, with Obama blasting Republican energy policies and McCain advocating a

large expansion of nuclear power.

McCain last week became the first presidential candidate in recent memory to tour a nuclear plant. His energy proposals include building 45 nuclear-power plants by 2030.

Radioactive legacy

Glasier also believes the time to return to nuclear power is now, and he believes Paradox Valley, 230 miles southwest of Denver, is well placed to reap the rewards.

But the nation's turn toward nuclear energy is worrisome to many, and in particular in Paradox Valley.

Glasier's Energy Fuels Inc. has two mines that are close to being fully permitted, five parcels with existing but closed mines, about 45,000 acres yet to be explored plus the 1,000-acre Paradox Valley mill site. All of its properties are in Colorado, Utah and Arizona.

The proposed uranium mill would cost as much as \$150 million to build, money that Glasier is still trying to raise. The company hopes to begin construction by 2010.

A Web site has sprung up in opposition to the plan, and some residents are forming groups.



Anna Cotter, 72, moved to the area in 1955, when the uranium industry was booming. Her husband sold mining machinery and her relatives worked the mines.

But the valley has changed since then, she said.

"I personally don't want that going on again," Cotter said.

Glasier's mill would process uranium ore into yellowcake and ship it to a conversion plant in Metropolis, Ill.

Industry officials say new technology such as enclosed radioactive-waste containers has made processing safer than in the past.

But the plan drafted by Energy Fuels has not convinced everyone. The people of Paradox Valley have seen nearby communities saddled for years with radioactive contamination. Uranium miners have suffered from lung cancer, pulmonary fibrosis and pneumoconiosis, a lung disease from inhaling dust.

Prices rising

The same fight is brewing across the country, as residents and environmental groups try to block new mines and processing facilities for the nuclear industry.

From the 1940s through the Cold War, miners using Geiger counters staked claims in areas with large uranium reserves, such as Uravan, Colo.; Ticaboo, Utah; and Grants, N. M.

There was little to no government oversight of mines or mills, said Glasier, who spent 14 years working for a large U.S. uranium producer.

Miners in the 1900s would toss aside uranium, which had no value next to the steel-hardening vanadium that they sought.

"They didn't have regulations on how you dispose of waste and all these things in those days," Glasier said. "So they didn't build these mills with any of the environmental protections. Regulations today are tighter on uranium mills than probably any other chemical plant in world."

When the Berlin Wall fell, uranium from weapons stockpiles flooded the market and prices plummeted from \$40 a pound in the late 1970s to less than \$10 a pound in 2002.

The Three Mile Island reactor accident in 1979 and the 1986 Chernobyl disaster brought the nuclear industry to a standstill.

Only one conventional uranium mill remains in operation today, near Blanding, Utah.



There has since been a resurgence of support for nuclear power. There has been a 15 percent increase in the world's known recoverable uranium resources, according to the World Nuclear Association.

Australia has the biggest supply of known recoverable uranium resources, about 23 percent. Russia has 10 percent and the United States has 6 percent.

About 90 percent of the uranium needed for U.S. power plants is imported, much of it from Russia, Glasier said. "The U.S. needs to have at least some degree of production to have security of supply."

The first application since 1988 for a uranium-processing facility was filed in October with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Since then, the NRC has received 27 applications for facilities in Wyoming, Nebraska, South Dakota, Arizona and New Mexico. Utah, Colorado and Texas have their own oversight agencies.

Safety concerns first

In meetings to sell his plan, residents have vented their fears and sometimes their anger on Glasier, 62, who arrive in Paradox Valley about 15 years ago.

"If they take a look at technical protections built into this mill, they'll realize . . . this thing is benign when it comes to environment," he said.

As momentum builds in the nuclear industry, so does the pushback.

[Groups are fighting plans to expand uranium mining and environmental groups have filed a federal lawsuit claiming that a program clearing the way for uranium mines in western Colorado is illegal.](#)