

THURSDAY
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Animal claims may be added to uranium lawsuit

Associated Press

Conservation groups say they may add endangered species claims to a lawsuit seeking to stop uranium mining in western Colorado.

The groups are suing the U.S. Department of Energy over a leasing program for more uranium mining on 42 square miles near Dolores River Canyon in southwest Colorado.

The lawsuit has been pending since last summer in federal court in Denver.

The environmentalists said Wednesday that more uranium mining would release poisons that could hurt protected fish and waterfowl living on the Dolores and San Miguel rivers.

“This uranium development is going to irretrievably impact” the rivers, said Taylor McKinnon, public-lands program director for the Arizona-based Center for Biological Diversity, one of the groups that filed the lawsuit.

Southwest Colorado was a major uranium-producing area in the 1940s and 1950s. Some of the material for the nation’s first nuclear weapons came from the area.

However, production slowed when uranium prices plummeted in the 1980s and 1990s. In recent years, rising uranium prices have spurred a flurry of applications for uranium claims.

In 2007, the Department of Energy concluded that more uranium mining would have no significant environmental impacts and approved 16 new leases. Environmental groups sued last year to force the agency to reconsider. No trial date has been set.

Among the fishes to be named in the environmental groups’ amended complaint are the pikeminnow, razorback sucker, and humpback and bonytail chubs. The groups say federal authorities have not properly considered the impact of uranium mining on those and other species.

The DOE has not formally responded to the claims, made in a letter sent by the group. A call to the department Wednesday was referred to the agency’s general counsel office, where a staffer said the department could not comment on the additional claims.

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