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## Green groups battling uranium boom in SW Colorado laud district court ruling

By David O. Williams

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A U.S. District Court judge late last week gave opponents of a looming uranium mining boom in Southwest Colorado some more fuel, if you will, in their legal fight to nuke a Department of Energy mine leasing program along the scenic Dolores and San Miguel rivers.

Judge Wiley Daniel ruled Thursday that a coalition of conservation groups suing the DOE could now question officials and obtain leasing records for a 42-square-mile uranium mining program environmentalists claim threatens water quality and wildlife habitat near the Dolores and San Miguel rivers in southwestern Colorado and eastern Utah.

“This is a big victory for the Dolores and San Miguel rivers and a good sign

for our litigation,” Travis Stills of the Durango-based Energy Minerals Law Center said in a release. His organization is representing the Colorado Environmental Coalition, Information Network for Responsible Mining, Center for Native Ecosystems and Center for Biological Diversity in a lawsuit filed against the DOE and the Bureau of Land Management in July of 2008.

“Chief Judge Daniel took a thorough look at the filings and agreed that this lawsuit brings a comprehensive challenge to the DOE’s failure to take a hard look at the effects of the uranium lease program, the issuance of uranium leases, and the approval of exploration and mining activity.”

Uranium mining leases have been on the rise as a growing number of politicians, including Colorado Sen. Mark Udall, have called for a resurgence in



uranium mining protest; photo not credited

the nation’s nuclear power industry as part of an overall effort to achieve energy independence using carbon-free sources.

But uranium mining and milling in Colorado have a dirty past, and many conservationists are concerned with going back down that road in some of the state’s most scenic wild places. A proposal for a new uranium mill in western Montrose County has been hotly contested and is largely seen as linked to the nearby mining lease program.