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Groups challenge Forest Service decision on coal lease

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By Amy Joi O'Donoghue,
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SALT LAKE CITY — A group of environmental organizations is once again challenging federal approval of a lease that would open up the recovery of 57 million tons of coal in central Utah.

The Greens Hollow lease potentially involves 6,175 acres of land that would be accessed through underground workings of the existing SUFCO mine owned by Kentucky-based Bowie Resources.

An environmental impact statement says the agency action would extend mining at SUFCO for nearly nine years and result in a new coal resource accessed through underground longwall mining.

An earlier decision by the Forest Service saying it would approve the federal lease, which is managed by the Bureau of Land



Multiple groups are challenging the U.S. Forest Service approval of a lease that would lead to the recovery of 57 million tons of coal by extending the geographic reach of the SUFCO mine in central Utah.

Management, was made in 2011 but appealed the next year.

The federal agency then withdrew its position and has released a revised analysis on the impacts, including surface disturbances that include mine vents and a power line.

The Center for Biological Diversity, WildEarth Guardians, The Grand Canyon Trust and the Sierra Club are urging the Forest Service to withdraw its approval, asserting the decision to allow coal mining is in direct contradiction to what should be a clean energy agenda pursued by the Obama administration.

"This coal lease is another example of the dangerous disconnect between (President Barack) Obama's climate rhetoric and his

policies that open public land to fossil fuel extraction,” said Taylor McKinnon of the Center for Biological Diversity.

In their official objection filed last week, the groups cite a litany of impacts, including potential threats to the already imperiled greater sage grouse, air quality concerns from coal transport, and the increase in greenhouse gas emissions.

The analysis prepared by the Forest Service notes that the extension of the SUFCO mine's geographic footprint would result in the continued employment of 383 mine workers and generate \$189 million in tax revenue.

The Forest Service has to respond to the appeal by June 1.