

<https://www.eenews.net/energywire/2019/05/17/stories/1060345677>

OIL SHALE

Greens sue Interior to block pipelines, power lines

[Scott Streater](#), E&E News reporter

Published: Friday, May 17, 2019

Environmental and public health advocacy groups are suing the federal government over its approval of pipelines and transmission across federal lands, assets tied to a proposed oil shale facility in Utah. Oil shale is shown. Enefit American Oil

A coalition of environmental and public health advocacy groups is suing the Interior Department over its decision to allow pipelines and power lines associated with a proposed Utah oil shale plant to cross federal lands.

Enefit American Oil needs the two transmission lines and three underground pipelines for water, natural gas and oil products to operate its long-planned "South Project," billed as the nation's first oil shale production plant.

The company — the Salt Lake City-based arm of Estonian-owned Eesti Energia AS — plans to build a 50,000-barrel-per-day oil shale production plant on private lands. The power lines and pipelines at issue would cross about 420 acres of BLM lands.

But the new [lawsuit](#) filed yesterday in the U.S. District Court for the District of Utah is as much about the coalition's opposition to the oil shale production plant as the impacts of the pipelines and power lines to federal lands and waters.

The groups — the Center for Biological Diversity, Grand Canyon Trust, Living Rivers, Colorado RiverKeeper, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Sierra Club, Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment and the Waterkeeper Alliance — have fought the plant for years, saying it will cause air and water pollution in the region.

They also note it will drain as much as 3.5 billion gallons a year from the Green River, a move that could harm habitat for the endangered Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker. Critics of drilling in the region say the process of extracting crude oil from shale rock is too resource-intensive and could take 3 barrels of water for every barrel of oil produced.

"This is a prescription for disaster for our climate, wildlife, and the Colorado River Basin," Ted Zukoski, a senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity, said in a statement.

"Draining the Green River to mine one of the most carbon-intensive fuels on the planet sends us in exactly the wrong direction," Zukoski added. "It's putting us on a collision course with climate catastrophe so a foreign fossil-fuel company can make big bucks."

The complaint says the environmental review by the Bureau of Land Management and the Fish and Wildlife Service was too narrow — only looking at the "relatively minimal impacts" of the pipelines and transmission lines, not the overall impacts of the planned oil shale development.

"This impermissibly narrow review violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA), undermined informed decision making and public participation, and failed to prevent harm to imperiled fish and plant species," it adds.

The groups ask the court to throw out BLM's September 2018 record of decision approving the right-of-way grants, as well as an associated biological opinion conducted by FWS.

An Interior Department spokeswoman said she could not comment on ongoing litigation, and a Justice Department spokesman could not be reached for comment.

The lawsuit follows a notice of intent to sue that the groups filed in February ([Energywire](#), Feb. 27).