

Oil shale project would be a disaster for the Colorado River Basin

[Meteor Blades](#)

Andrea Germanos at Common Dreams reports on a topic I covered extensively in the 1980s for several publications, including two limited-circulation publications *Inside DOE* and *SynFuels Weekly*: oil shale. *Not* shale oil.



The White River, near the proposed rights-of-way for commercial oil shale project in Utah.

[By Meteor Blades](#)

The difference is that shale oil is liquid crude trapped in tiny pores in the rock that can be extracted via high-pressure hydraulic fracturing. Oil shale contains kerogen. To get usable liquid from the kerogen, the rock must be heated to around 950 degrees Fahrenheit (500 degrees Celsius) in the absence of oxygen in process called retorting.

Germanos writes [New LawsUIT Challenges Energy-Intensive 'Disaster for Climate, Wildlife, and Colorado River Basin'](#):

Michael Toll, a staff attorney at Grand Canyon Trust, laid out what the project would entail:

Enefit's South Project would dig up more than 28 million tons of oil shale per year, generating hundreds of millions of tons of waste rock and "overburden"—the industry term for the soils, plants, and layers of rock that lie in the way.

It would also drain more than 3 billion gallons of water per year from the Green River in a region that averages fewer than 10 inches of precipitation annually. The total carbon dioxide emissions of the over 547 million barrels of oil produced over three decades—if you follow the lifecycle of the oil shale from mine to wheel—would be up to 75 percent higher than those of conventional fuels. [...]

Although oil shale has been produced commercially in several countries, including small amounts in the United States between the 1890s and 1930s, efforts to mass produce it in the 1980s (with billions in federal subsidies) as a hedge against future OPEC oil embargoes came to naught. There are huge deposits of oil shale in Colorado and Utah, with a bit in Wyoming.

A coalition of conservation groups filed a legal challenge this week to the Trump administration's approval of what would be the nation's first commercial-scale oil shale mine and processing facility—a fossil fuel project the groups say would run roughshod over the environment.

At issue is Estonia-based Enefit American Oil's strip-mining South Project for eastern Utah's Uinta Basin.

In their [lawsuit](#) (pdf) filed Thursday in U.S. District Court in Utah, the organizations say that the administration violated the law in approving several rights of way for utilities across public lands to enable the company to construct and operate its proposed 50,000-barrel-per-day project [...]

“The responsible federal agencies have worn blinders in approving this project, leaving themselves and the public in the dark about the immense ecological harm it would cause,” [said](#) Alex Hardee, an associate attorney at Earthjustice.

(Crossposted from [DailyKos](#). Photo By Ray Bloxham, Utah Wilderness Alliance)