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## Feds take new, fresh look at Colo. uranium mining

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By [Joe Hanel](#) Herald Staff Writer

DENVER - The federal government is beginning a detailed study of uranium mining in Western Colorado, meeting one of the key demands of environmentalists who had sued over claims of lax oversight by regulators.

Four environmental groups sued the Department of Energy in 2008 over its Uranium Leasing Program. The DOE owns thousands of uranium-bearing acres in San Miguel, Montrose and Mesa counties and leases them to mining companies.

The plaintiffs contend that the department's last environmental assessment wasn't serious enough, and they sued to force the government to do a full Environmental Impact Statement.

On Monday, the Department of Energy told the federal court in Denver it had formally begun crafting an Environmental Impact Statement.

Hilary White of the Sheep Mountain Alliance hailed the news as a victory, saying potential new mines and the proposed Piñon Ridge uranium mill pose serious concerns for the environment and water quality.

"We have to understand and mitigate existing contamination problems in the area before the government allows new mining to ramp up," White said in a news release.

DOE lawyers say the case now should be dropped, because they have begun an EIS and because no one is currently mining on federal lease tracts.

But the plaintiffs also want to overturn all DOE actions and leases that rely on the 2007 Environmental Assessment.

The government is not admitting that its original Programmatic Environmental Analysis violated the National Environmental Policy Act.

"In short, DOE gave a hard look at potential impacts, and the analysis in the lengthy PEA satisfied NEPA," wrote Justice Department lawyer Marissa Piropatto.

The DOE will hold public meetings Aug. 8 to 11 in Telluride, Naturita, Montrose and San Juan County, Utah.

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