

You are currently viewing the printable version of this article, to return to the normal page, please [click here](#).

State approves tar sands mine but requires water monitoring

By BRADY McCOMBS - Associated Press - Monday, July 20, 2015

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) - Utah state officials have given the go-ahead for a tar sands mine under construction on the eastern flank of the state. They will, however, require the company to do water and air quality monitoring in a move environmentalists are calling a victory.

Utah Division of Oil, Gas and Mining director John Baza said Monday that his decision addresses concerns raised by opposition while acknowledging that U.S. Oil Sands Inc., the Canadian company building the mine, has complied with regulations.

Baza's ruling, announced late Friday, comes nearly three weeks after he hosted a public hearing to listen to concerns from opponents and give the company a chance to explain a project under construction on a ridge top in the Book Cliffs area on the border of Uintah County more than 200 miles southeast of Salt Lake City.

U.S. Oil Sands must now submit a plan for the monitoring by Nov. 1, Baza said. As long as the company does that, Baza said it will be cleared to move forward with plans to begin extracting oil sands later this year from a sparsely populated area that is home to many types of wildlife such as deer, beavers and bears.

The company already had permission to begin mining under a previously approved plan, but it resubmitted a new proposal for an expanded operation. The company has invested nearly \$100 million over a decade to get permits, buy equipment and develop a new technology.

The company says its process is starkly different than the one used by the numerous operations in Canada, relying on a citrus solvent and plan that is more environmentally friendly and leaves the earth less disturbed.

U.S. Oil Sands CEO Cameron Todd said the company plans to comply with all the state's requirements by coming up with a plan to do the monitoring required. "I'm glad everyone is happy," said Todd, adding the decision is what they expected.

Company officials have said previously there are no measurable quantities of water in the area and that they have gone beyond what is required to show the mine will have a minimal effect on the environment.

Rob Dubuc, an attorney representing the Living Rivers environmental protection organization that has protested the project, called it a pleasant surprise that Baza heeded their warnings about water issues. The area is not only home to wildlife, it is used by hunters and outdoor recreationalists and is home to a few ranching families.

"This is a big deal and it's a step in the right direction," Dubuc said. "To expect DOGM (Division of Oil, Gas and Mining) to deny the permit is not realistic in this political environment. But at least they are doing the right thing by requiring the monitoring."

Dubuc said measuring effects on water and air quality could help prove whether the company or environmentalists are correct about possible contamination.

Tar sands mines extract oil from minerals in the earth by digging relatively shallow pits, a process that costs more than pumping liquid oil.

[Copyright 2015 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.](#)