



NEWS RELEASE

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Legal Challenge to Stop Water Pollution by Tar Sands Mine in Utah

Division of Water Quality Allowing Tar Sands Mine Expansion Without Oversight Despite New Studies Showing Water Pollution Likely

SALT LAKE CITY, UT (February 18, 2015) – In the afternoon of February 17th Western Resource Advocates filed a legal challenge on behalf of Living Rivers against the Utah Division of Water Quality (DWQ) for allowing the U.S. Oil Sands' PR Spring Mine, a tar sands strip mine, to proceed with a four-fold expansion of their mining operation without further review. New studies show that the area of the expanded mine is a recharge zone for perennial springs in Main Canyon, below the mine. Additionally, tests conducted by the company show that diesel range organic compounds in the mine tailings will be thousands of times greater than the maximum contaminant levels allowed in drinking water. Despite the expansion of the proposed mine and the new water pollution evidence, DWQ intends to allow the mine to proceed without a new permit.

U.S. Oil Sands is a company from Alberta, Canada that owns the PR Spring mine located near the Book Cliffs in Uintah County. The Division of Water Quality's existing permit-by-rule allows the PR Spring mine to proceed with ridge-top tar sand mining, processing and disposal in this area without pit liners or monitoring. However, recently completed hydrogeochemistry studies by the University of Utah have shown natural springs in the area are recharged from the area where the strip mine will be expanded. In addition, analysis of process wastes from the mine show that organic compounds in those wastes will be thousands of times greater than levels regulated in drinking water. These tailings have the potential to contaminate springs in Main Canyon, an area renowned for wildlife and the water supply for a ranching operation.

“The State of Utah consistently seems to place development of these dirty fuels above protecting public health and the environment,” said lead attorney Rob Dubuc of Western Resource Advocates. “With clear evidence showing that the area of the mine is connected to area seeps and springs, there's simply no justification for DWQ to allow the mine to expand operations without appropriate oversight.”

“The Utah DWQ assumes an absence of groundwater in the area, and assumes that the organic compounds leached to precipitation and snowmelt are inconsequential”, said Dr. William Johnson of the University of Utah. “Our hydrogeochemical data show that the ridges, including the permitted site, are where snowmelt and precipitation enters the subsurface to feed perennial springs in nearby canyons. Those who depend on these springs include a ranching family, livestock, recreationalists, and wildlife. The measurements made by U.S. Oil Sands themselves show that the leached concentration of diesel range organic compounds will be thousands of times greater than the maximum contaminant levels that are regulated in drinking water. The State of Utah should genuinely consider potential impacts to this water resource over decades of operation.”

“These petrochemicals from the mine tailings will be extremely hazardous,” said John Weisheit, Conservation Director of Living Rivers. “The scientific evidence is very clear on this point. We need action by the State to protect drinking water and wildlife.”

“With the company’s own tests showing dangerous levels of diesel compounds will be in their waste piles, it’s time for the State to step up and require U.S. Oil Sands to protect these waters,” said Rob Dubuc. “DWQ needs to properly regulate this mine.”

Background: The desired product from the tar sands strip mine is bitumen, used for applications such as to boil water at power generating station, a binder for sand and gravel in paving of roads, and a waterproofing materials for roof construction. If refined the bitumen may be upgraded to become transportation fuel. The energy value of this heavy crude is 50% compared to 97% for conventional light crude. The technology that is proposed for the PR Spring mine is unproven.

*For the last 25 years **Western Resource Advocates** has been the West’s premier group of experts protecting the region’s air, land and water. WRA’s pragmatic team of lawyers, scientists and economists craft innovative solutions for the most complex natural resource challenges in the region. WRA shapes a clean energy future that reduces pollution, protects our unique western lands, and addresses climate change. The organization restores degraded rivers and champions solutions to ensure a reliable water future. Go to www.westernresourceadvocates.org and follow us on Twitter @WRADV.*

***Living Rivers** promotes river restoration through mobilization. By articulating conservation and alternative management strategies to the public, we seek to revive the natural habitat and spirit of rivers by undoing the extensive damage done by dams, diversions and pollution on the Colorado Plateau. Visit www.livingrivers.org for more information*