

Powertech plugs test wells; plans for NoCo uranium mine still on drawing board

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Powertech USA closed its Wellington office and all but disappeared from Northern Colorado over the past two years, but the plugging of four groundwater testing wells shows signs of activity at its proposed Centennial Project uranium mine site.

Documents Powertech filed with the Colorado Division of Water Resources in January show that the company plugged and abandoned four two-inch groundwater monitoring wells the company drilled into the Laramie-Fox Hills Aquifer.

The wells were among 34 monitoring wells the company drilled as part of preparations to build its planned in situ leach uranium mine about 15 miles northeast of Fort Collins between Wellington and Nunn.

The wells were “superfluous, and we closed them,” said Powertech Vice President of Exploration James Bonner.

He said the plugged wells are unrelated to injection wells drilled for a “pump test” that was subject to a contentious U.S. Environmental Protection Agency permitting process prior to Powertech pausing the Centennial Project.

Powertech decided in 2011 to suspend the development of the project in order to devote its resources to the permitting of the Dewey-Burdock uranium mine in South Dakota.

“Centennial is still an active project on the books,” Bonner said Wednesday. “This permitting process in South Dakota is taking a lot of effort and a lot of time and most of our resources now. (When) we get that up and going, then we will be able to focus on Centennial.”

Since new groundwater restoration requirements were implemented several years ago and Powertech put Centennial on hold, members of the mining industry have been skeptical about the project’s future.

Colorado’s groundwater restoration requirements, which force in situ uranium miners to fully clean up the groundwater beneath a mine, make it nearly impossible for companies to extract uranium using a chemical process called in situ leaching, similar to the oil industry’s hydraulic fracturing, Colorado Mining Association President Stuart Sanderson said last summer.

“It’s kind of ironic that fracking, which is not completely dissimilar technology, is occurring throughout Northern Colorado, and this one small uranium mining company has had to put the project on hold” because of difficulty seeking a permit, he said.

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