

State board unanimously adopts uranium mining reforms

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Colorado's Mined Land Reclamation Board (MLRB) Thursday established new rules to protect Colorado's groundwater during in-situ uranium mining, drawing quick and effusive praise from members of the state's conservation community who have been working on uranium mining issues for years.

The MLRB also voted unanimously to revise existing rules regarding the disclosure of additional information during prospecting activities and to update hard rock mining fees.

"These rules will protect our groundwater resources by requiring baseline characterization and grant much greater transparency to the impacted communities regarding the proposed mining activities," MLRB board member Mike King, the executive director of the Department of Natural Resources, said in a release. "DRMS [Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety] did a remarkable job in framing the issues, incorporating public concerns and developing a truly balanced set of regulations."

According to a press release from the state, "the rule making implements a trio of laws passed during the 2008 legislative session that were driven in part by concerns over the potential impact on groundwater from in-situ uranium mining, a developing technology that uses chemical solutions to leach uranium from underground rock formations."

Coloradoans Against Resource Destruction (CARD) and Environment Colorado helped pass some of the nation's toughest uranium laws as well as mine prospecting legislation back in 2008, and Thursday's 7-0 decision represented the final steps to put the new protections into Colorado law.

"We're pleased with the board's decision today in passing rules that protect groundwater and ensure public involvement in uranium mining decisions," said Jeff Parsons, the attorney with the Western Mining Action Project who represented CARD and Environment Colorado.

Recent attempts to revive Colorado's once booming, although historically highly toxic, uranium mining and processing industry have led to a flurry of legislative action to head off the pollution problems of the 60s, 70s and 80s.

Go to the Department of Natural Resources website for more details on Thursday's decision.