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Board's ruling boosts uranium-mill backers

By Gary Harmon

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A favorable action by state regulators has the backers of a planned uranium mill in Montrose County saying that long-term economics also augur well for the mill.

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment is to decide in April whether to issue a radioactive materials-handling permit to Energy Fuels Inc., but on Thursday it rejected an appeal of a previous license by an environmental group. The decision, however, requires regulators within the department to consider comments made over several days last fall before an administrative law judge, Richard Dana.

The ruling is "another step forward in the process," Energy Fuels spokesman Curtis Moore said, noting that the company expects continued opposition from environmental groups.

The Sheep Mountain Alliance was pleased that the agency is required to consider evidence raised at the hearing in the fall.

"In light of this damning evidence on the potential impacts of the Pinon Ridge Mill and the lack of a thorough and independent review process by the state, we believe they have no other option than to deny the license after a second more professionally conducted review process," Director Hilary White said.

Environmental groups are "free to do what they wish," Moore said, but "it seems to me they are wasting their members' money and resources when they could be solving real environmental issues."

Energy Fuels remains committed to constructing the \$150 million mill, Moore said, noting that while the current market for uranium is "soft," or about \$43 a pound, the medium- to long-term economics of uranium "look better now than they even did pre-Fukushima."

A tidal wave in 2011 swamped a nuclear reactor in the Fukushima province of Japan, stoking fears of nuclear power around the world and causing the price of uranium to fall dramatically.