

P^{BLACK HILLS} PIONEER

NEWS

Powertech looks for more uranium

[Print Page](#)

By **Brandon Bennett**
Black Hills Pioneer

Published:
Friday, January 25, 2008 3:48 PM CST

ALADDIN, WYO. Powertech, the Canadian-based mining company that is looking for uranium in southwest South Dakota, has recently completed test drilling in the Aladdin, Wyo. area in hopes of finding some there. The drilling was conducted between August and November 2007 and the company found what they were looking for.

The 13,900-acre project is located about five miles north of Aladdin. The claim is in an area where a number of surface uranium occurrences were mined during the 1950's.

The drilling included 60 rotary drill holes in and adjacent to an area of historical uranium drilling within sandstone of the late Cretaceous Inyan Kara group. The drilling confirmed the presence of uranium in the area of the historical drilling and revealed more uranium outside the historic drilling area.

Richard F. Clement Jr., President and CEO of Powertech, states "We are extremely pleased with the results of our 2007 drill program at Aladdin. We were successful in confirming the historical data that was acquired on the project, thus increasing our confidence in the database. We were also able to expand the zones of uranium mineralization and increase the exploration potential of the project," he said.

Near that site is another exploratory location named the Dewey Terrace site just west of the very southwest tip of South Dakota. This claim has a total of 8,440 acres staked along historic mineralized trends as defined by past drilling. The objective of this drilling was to confirm what information was contained in historic databases that indicated the presence of uranium.

This too is an area that was previously drilled to ascertain what kinds and amounts of uranium existed there.

Now that drilling is done, the next step for Powertech is to apply for permits to begin mining for the uranium using the in situ leach process. In situ leach mining involves injecting a solution of water and a mild natural acid into the vein. The solution dissolves the uranium and then the uranium is pumped out and collected. Historically, the process means only a small amount of ground is disturbed and will need to be reclaimed.

With other projects going on, one wonders how the drilling and in situ leach mining will affect not only the soil but the water as well. Some environmental and tribal groups have protested the mining in South Dakota, saying the process will negatively impact groundwater and contaminate supplies. Some residents near the project site have expressed concerns about the water and some were opposed to the drilling altogether.

Wilma and Jay Tope own land completely surrounded by land leased by Powertech for drilling. The Topes have formed a group to address the issues they feel are coming to them that are affiliated with the Powder River Basin Resource Group based in Sheridan, Wyo. "We have a lot of concerns that include possible contamination of the aquifers. We have other concerns as well. There are some cultural sites out here, like the site of an Indian battle that could be impacted by any exploration," said Wilma.

Not only that, Tope is worried about wells from earlier exploration that were not capped properly. In addition, ground water supplies could be affected as well.

The biggest concern, according to Tope, is what possible uranium mining will do to land values. "Who wants to buy a place in the middle of a uranium mine? Not too many people. If you're someone who planned on passing your farm, ranch, or just your home to your children, as an investment for them, it's going to cause a huge drop in the value of your property," she said.

Those are questions Powertech has to answer with the State of Wyoming. The Land Quality division of the Environmental Quality department monitors what is going on, as well as the water quality division. Mark Rogaczewski, Land Quality District Supervisor in Sheridan, Wyo. says this is a long process.

"We have rules and regulations they have to match, and they have to send us an entire permit application that would include maps of the area they are going to be mining, and how they're going to do it, where the wells are going to be and vegetation, ground water, surface water in the area, the whole thing. It's similar to a coal mine," he said.

But Wilma Tope said they didn't see any inspectors on site until the Powder River Basin Resource Group wrote a letter to the Department of Environmental Quality. Then inspections were done. But she says they're not trying to hinder anyone. "Our objective is to educate people about what is going on. It seems like it was kept very quiet," she said.

The length of the permitting process depends on having the permit completed accurately, but it could take two years. One of the basic requirements is a reclamation bond that ensures that restoring the land to its original condition is done after mining is completed. These bonds could be several hundred thousand dollars to hundreds of millions, depending on the size of the operation.

With regard to water, Mark Taylor, hydrologist with the water quality division of the Land Quality Department says years of mining and drilling have made the state very conscious of protecting water supplies. "Every hole that's ever been drilled has gone through these ore zones, and there haven't been any problems. Now there have been when some company doesn't do reclamation right, but for the most part, there have been no problems because everyone else wants to do this right," he said.

Taylor did mention a time when some drilling had been done in the Pumpkin Buttes area of Wyoming and some artesian wells went dry. But that was just a loss of pressure, he said. He stated that shows there are results from mining sometimes.

One thing Taylor notices when he is out in the field monitoring drilling is that there will be a stock pond right next to the site where work is being done. "It's not great water because of uranium concentration, but it's being used. You wouldn't advise people to drink it or use it for domestic use, but I'm sure over the course of history people have," he said.

But he reiterates the fact that to date, there are no contamination problems related to mining, because the state does monitor the situations closely. Taylor concluded by saying that while the state of Wyoming doesn't have a requirement to establish a baseline for monitoring water, that might not be a bad idea, so landowners and mining companies alike can make comparisons of water before and after mining to see if there are any effects.

Copyright © 2008 - The Black Hills Pioneer

[x] Close Window