

Simplot Seeks mineral

Fertilizer giant exploring leases acquired in 2000

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Jeff Cundick, minerals branch chief for the Bureau of Land Management, said the J.R. Simplot company is conducting phosphate exploration in the Dairy Sink Line area of Caribou County.

The phosphate company holds several mineral leases involving as much as 2,500 acres of National Forest Service land at Dairy Sink Line, located 12 miles west of the Smoky Canyon Mine.

"They will probably submit a plan to mine more next summer," Cundick said. "They could submit a mining and reclamation plan as early as next year." Cundick said Simplot acquired the leases at an auction in 2000. Obtaining the federal lease is the first phase in development, he said. Typically, exploration continues for about two years. If drilling indicates sufficient reserves, Simplot would be required to submit a mining and reclamation plan for the site. The company's reclamation plan outlines how it will restore the land after it's mined.

Cundick said rock caps are typically put in place to keep selenium, a naturally occurring element that can be toxic at higher concentrations, from being leached up by vegetation.

Selenium is part of the waste rock from phosphate mining.

That information is evaluated by a team of experts and used to formulate the plan. Cundick said the process can take as long as 4 years and includes collecting public input. "It takes about 7 years to explore the property and decide if it's worth mining," he said. J.R. Simplot Spokesman Rick Phillips said phosphate mining in the Dairy Sink Line area of Caribou County is still years away from the development phase.

"Once we are through mining at Smoky Canyon, we'll start looking at other options," he said.

Phillips said the phosphate giant is still waiting for the Environmental Impact Statement before proceeding to the next phase of development at Smoky Canyon, located on the Idaho-Wyoming border.