

### **Issue Overview: Uranium Mining in the Roanoke River Basin**

Coles Hill uranium mine is located in Chatham, Virginia. Virginia Uranium, Inc., owner of the mining rights to the site, estimates that the site contains 119 million pounds of uranium ore, valued between 7 and 10 billion dollars. The mine is located in the upper Roanoke River basin, an area that is outside of the APNEP region but within the Albemarle-Pamlico watershed. The Roanoke River flows into the Albemarle Sound.

Since the early 1980's, Virginia has maintained a moratorium on uranium mining throughout the state. However, there is currently discussion and a legislative study underway regarding the prospect of lifting the moratorium. The issue is likely to receive thorough consideration by the Virginia legislature in early 2012.

Additionally, the National Academy of Sciences is conducting a study of the issue. In December 2011, NAS is slated to issue a report characterizing the expected environmental and public health impacts of uranium mining at the site. A separate socioeconomic study is also due at that time, which was commissioned by the Virginia Coal and Energy Commission and is being conducted by Chmura Economics and Analytics. The City of Virginia Beach commissioned a separate study of the issue, which has been released (<http://bit.ly/jos95d>) and submitted to NAS.

Generally, uranium mining proponents point to the significant economic benefits such an operation could bring, as well as benefits related to energy security and greenhouse gas reductions. Those that wish to keep the ban in place are primarily concerned with the environmental impacts and risks related to the mining process and storage of radioactive materials. These risks include potential radioactive contamination of downstream water sources. The Virginia Beach study highlighted risks to Lake Gaston, which serves as the primary water source for many in the Hampton Roads area.

Numerous environmental groups have weighed in on this issue, hoping to keep the mining moratorium in place. Several communities have each passed resolutions calling for the moratorium to remain. Additionally, the non-profit American Rivers designated the Roanoke River as one of the country's most threatened a few weeks ago, primarily due to the uranium mining issue.

At the moment, few groups appear to be openly endorsing renewed mining in the area. Virginia Uranium, Inc. is naturally a vocal proponent for mining. The Virginia Energy Independence Alliance is also actively supporting the mining effort.

On the following page, please see a selection of news items and organizational links related to this issue.

## **For Further Reading**

### *News Items*

- Va. becomes ground zero for uranium mining efforts. New York Times. May 27, 2011. <http://nyti.ms/kObllc>.
- In Virginia, the appeal of uranium mining. Time. Feb. 23, 2009. <http://ti.me/leVCF5>
- Editorial: Now, pre-emptive caution on uranium. Roanoke Times. May 19, 2011. <http://www.roanoke.com/editorials/wb/286973>
- Group: Uranium plan threatens Roanoke River. The Virginian-Pilot. May 18, 2011. <http://hamptonroads.com/2011/05/group-uranium-plan-threatens-roanoke-river>
- Possible uranium mining puts Roanoke River on nation's 'most endangered' list. The Washington Post. May 17, 2011. <http://wapo.st/mFzPMO>
- Editorial- Uranium: dig deeper. Fredericksburg Free-Lance Star. May 16, 2011. <http://fredericksburg.com/News/FLS/2011/052011/05162011/626487>
- Coalition to keep the ban on uranium mining in Virginia growing statewide. The Gazette-Virginian Online. May 15, 2011. <http://www.gazettevirginian.com/index.php/news/34-news/3138-coalition-to-keep-the-ban-on-uranium-mining-in-virginia-growing-statewide>
- Anti-uranium groups ask NAS to consider Japan disaster. GoDanRiver.com. March 17, 2011. <http://bit.ly/iCGftY>.
- Editorial- No hurry on uranium vote. The Virginian-Pilot. March 18, 2011. <http://hamptonroads.com/2011/03/no-hurry-uranium-vote>
- Editorial: Digging a hole on uranium. The Roanoke Times. March 17, 2011. <http://www.roanoke.com/editorials/wb/280230>
- Panel weighs lifting ban on uranium mining in Virginia. The Virginian-Pilot. February 8, 2011. <http://hamptonroads.com/2011/02/panel-weighs-lifting-ban-uranium-mining-virginia>

### *Business and Organization Links*

- Virginia Uranium, Inc. <http://www.virginiauranium.com/>
- Roanoke River Basin Bi-State Commission. <http://www.deq.virginia.gov/vrrbac/Roanoke-River-Basin-Bi-State-Commission.html>
- Virginia Energy Independence Alliance: <http://www.virginiaenergy.org/home/>
- American Rivers: <http://www.virginiaenergy.org/home/>
- Southern Environmental Law Center: [http://www.southernenvironment.org/cases/uranium\\_mining\\_in\\_virginia](http://www.southernenvironment.org/cases/uranium_mining_in_virginia)
- A substantial list of organizations and municipalities who are opposing the ban can be found in the May 15<sup>th</sup> story.