

## **SPEAKOUT:**

# **Vote against uranium mine a state first**

**By Gary Wockner and Becky Long,  
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On Dec. 4, the Fort Collins City Council made Colorado history.

With a standing-room-only crowd that had just spent one hour testifying, the council took the bold leadership step of helping to secure the future of northern Colorado's economy and environment. Amidst hoots, hollers and eruptive applause, Fort Collins became the first Colorado city to pass a resolution against uranium mining in the northern part of our state.

Councilmember Lisa Poppaw introduced the resolution - it passed with a 6-0 vote with one member abstaining.

The threat in northern Colorado comes from a proposed project - the Centennial uranium mine - near the town of Nunn and just seven miles from Fort Collins. The mining company - a Canadian corporation named Powertech - is proposing an in-situ leach mining operation that will pump chemicals into the groundwater to leach out the uranium, and then pump the groundwater to the surface to chemically extract the uranium from the water. In addition, the mining company has not ruled out the possibility of digging a massive open-pit mine to extract the uranium by mechanical means.

Both types of mining - in-situ leach and open pit - pose serious health risks for local residents, and pose serious environmental and economic risks for Fort Collins and northern Colorado.

The potential health risks have caused both the Larimer County Medical Society and the Colorado Medical Society to pass resolutions against the mine. The environmental and economic risks have caused a multitude of people - elected officials from both political parties, farmers and ranchers, medical professionals, real estate agents and conservationists - to take a stand against the mine, the city of Fort Collins being the latest in opposition.

One of the biggest health and environmental risks is to groundwater. The groundwater aquifer that Powertech will inject chemicals into feeds a huge network of drinking-water wells in northern Colorado, and also provides water for livestock and crop irrigation. Unfortunately, the track record of in-situ leach uranium mining is littered with groundwater pollution, spills, mistakes and clean-up problems that are left wanting for both money and often a government bailout.

The economic risks were also highlighted at the meeting when a local real estate agent described a potential buyer immediately backing out of a potential sale upon learning that the property was in the vicinity of the proposed mine. The bottom line: Nobody wants to live near a uranium mine. Risks to property values - even seven miles away in Fort Collins - are a serious concern.

Uranium mining in northern Colorado poses additional risks, including decreased tourism and sales tax revenues, loss of protections for the surface land owners, increased dust emissions and air pollution, and a host of other legal, technical and political detriments.

Uranium exploration is booming across the state, fed by a huge increase in the price of uranium and ample deposits in the bedrock below ground. Colorado ranks third among all states for its uranium reserves, only trailing Wyoming and New Mexico.

We encourage other communities in Colorado to take a long and hard look when uranium mines are proposed in their areas. Always ask hard questions of the mining company, always attend all public hearings, and don't be afraid - like the people of northern Colorado - to organize your own watchdog group. The coalition against the Centennial mine has created [www.nunnglow.com](http://www.nunnglow.com), and its e-mail list already has several thousand members.

On Dec. 4th, the city of Fort Collins made history by opposing this mine, but what it also did was help write a new history of Colorado. Instead of the history our generation inherited - one dotted with mines, endless pollution and endless Superfund clean-up costs - the next generation might inherit a cleaner, greener Colorado, one that protects both the economy and the environment.

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