UNPROFITABLE BUSINESS FOR INSURERS › A10

EDUCATION › UTAH PUBLIC COLLEGES

ition bump: 3% most students

RICK EGAN | The Salt Lake Tribune

ard of Regents on Friday approved a 3 percent tuition bump at Utah colleges and universi- versity of Utah is contemplating adding 0.5 percent on top of that.

ans a 3.5 percent hike; statewide increase is 16 years, but some families feel the pinch.

KNOX
me

dents will pay slight- college next year. raduates at the Uni- Utah will fork over a an most.

Tuition for the 2015-2016 school year is set to rise by about the same cost as an iPhone upgrade, a new pair of Jordans or a second-hand textbook — somewhere between $90 and $250, depending on the college and credit load.

The cost rises more for students from other states or others who take more than 15 credits each semester.

The state Board of Regents, which oversees Utah's eight public colleges, approved the baseline increase of 3.06 percent on Friday — down from 4 percent last year and the lowest

Please see TUITION, A4

Feds may rethink uranium project in Utah

Nuclear fuel » Idled La Sal mines sit on 4.5 million pounds, await rebound in prices.

By BRIAN MAFFLY
The Salt Lake Tribune

The U.S. Forest Service is rethinking a recent decision authorizing the expansion of the La Sal uranium mining complex in San Juan County.

Forest Service managers this month acknowledged deficiencies in the agency's environmental analysis of a project that could allow up to 9,800 new exploratory drilling holes.

The complex is a cluster of mines a mile east of the town of La Sal, along Highway 46 south of Moab.

Tunnels descend 1,000 feet to tap uranium ore that would be processed several miles south at White Mesa, where mine owner Energy Fuels Inc. operates a waste repository and the nation's last uranium mill.

The mines have been dormant since early 2013.

But last fall, Manti-La Sal National Forest Supervisor Brian Pentecost signed off on Energy Fuels' expansion plans after concluding the 20-year project would result in "no significant impact."

Moab-based Uranium Watch and other

Please see URANIUM, A4

"The ideal analyst ... he knew when to come in and when to make his points. He was really an exceptional analyst, but he wanted to do play-by-play."

dealt with the impact of Alzheimer's.

"Last summer, he was starting to slip a little bit," McCoy

"I'm aware every day of my life that I followed Hot Rod Hundley," Locke said Friday. "I don't think it will ever feel like my job, and I'm not sure

Twitter: @blaze

Tribune reporter Steve Luhm contributed to this report.

Uranium

» Continued from A1

environmental groups disputed that finding, and insisted the Forest Service conduct a full-blown Environmental Impact Statement, or EIS.

On March 20, reviewing officer George Iverson, based at regional offices in Ogden, concluded the national forest's decision was not well informed and lacked a solid rationale. He instructed Pentecost to address a number of concerns, but he did not require the local Forest Service manager to conduct the study environmentalists wanted.

The groups still hailed the change as a victory.

"The La Sal complex mines have a long and troubled history of neglect, safety violations and excessive impacts to human health and the environment," said Jennifer Thurston, director the Information Network for Responsible Mining. "It is encouraging that the Forest Service will be taking a much closer look at these impacts in the next round. I hope we will eventually have a plan for these mines that provides more protection for residents, miners and the environment."

Energy Fuels disputed environmentalists' characterization of the review.

"The U.S. Forest Service has not 'halted' our plans for the La Sal complex, but is merely addressing all public comments so that the plan ... will continue to be fully protective of public health, safety and the environment," said Curtis Moore, the Colorado-based firm's marketing vice president.

Most of the mines' impacts are underground and proposed test holes are bores just two or three inches in diameter, he said. The drilling is necessary to locate pockets containing the richest ore.

Environmentalists argue the exploratory drilling is not as benign as the company's description.

Plans also call for additional waste rock piles and vents.

"The continued operation of the La Sal mines complex will cause increasing emissions of radon gas, a radioactive, hazardous air pollutant, into the community," said Sarah Fields of Uranium Watch. "The [Forest Service] cannot claim that radon emissions only a quarter-mile from La Sal Elementary School are safe."

The four mines are on a mix of private, Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management land. Known as Pandora, Beaver Shaft, La Sal and Snowball, the mines collectively hold 4.5 million pounds of uranium oxide and another 22 million pounds of vanadium, according to Moore.

Vanadium is used in steel hardening and is showing promise in next-generation battery technologies.

Energy Fuels acquired the mines from Denison Mines Corp. in 2012, then idled them because of weak demand.

Following the Fukushima nuclear reactor meltdown in 2011, prices have remained weak — less than $45 a pound.

While prices have been soft, Energy Fuels has acquired most of Utah's promising uranium prospects, according to the Utah Geological Survey.

Prior to the La Sal shutdown, Utah uranium production was valued at around $30 million a year.

"Markets have improved over the past six months, but it is still not good," Moore said. He said prices would have to climb over $50 a pound to justify returning La Sal to service.

Still, he said, "we are very optimistic for uranium production in Utah."

The La Sal mines opened in the 1970s and have operated sporadically since. They most recently resumed production in 2007 when uranium prices shot past $140 during a short-lived "nuclear renaissance," when many observers saw atom splitting as a way to curb climate change associated with carbon emissions.

But the tsunami that disabled a Japanese power plant raised serious safety concerns, dampening interest in nuclear power.

Today, Energy Fuels is producing uranium only at Arizona's Pinenut Mine, where the ore is particularly rich at more than 1 percent uranium oxide.

In addition to the La Sal complex, Energy Fuels owns seven developed mines across the West and is developing 14 prospects from Wyoming to New Mexico. In the middle of the network is the company's White Mesa mill and dump near Blanding, which the company considers "a key strategic asset."

Environmentalists have raised doubts about the operation's safety, alleging its radon emissions exceed federal standards.

And the nearby Ute Mountain Ute community is displeased with the company's efforts to process "alternate feed" — waste from other operators that contains remnants of uranium.

"Until the mill corrects its violations of laws designed to protect public and environmental health, the federal government should not allow the mill to receive and process new uranium shipments," said Anne Mariah Tapp, energy program director for the Grand Canyon Trust.

bmaffly@sltrib.com

Tuition

» Continued from A1

average increase since 1999.

"It's really driven out concern for students and wanting to make sure we can keep college as affordable as possible," said higher education commissioner David Buhler.

He credits an uptick in legislative funding and internal cost-cutting by administrators for keeping tuition costs down.

Buhler and other higher education administrators hope the smaller tuition bump will help more students graduate on time and with less debt.

They note that Utah has the 3rd-lowest tuition nationwide, according to The College Board.

"I'm hoping this kind of range will be the norm," Buhler said. "You can't predict the future, but it would be nice if you could keep it at this level or even less. From a student perspective, I know it would be nice if it didn't go up at all."

Adam Hawker, a 21-year-old sophomore at the U., said he'll likely hold off on adding to his movie collection, make more meals at home and maybe get a second job to meet the higher tuition costs.

"It's just gonna be budgeting money more wisely" and maybe getting a second job, said Hawker, who works about 20 hours a week at a market research firm.

Even though his tuition payments are set to climb only slightly, Hawker, who wants to be an accountant, spends $300-$500 a semester on books for his pre-business courses.

The U. is the only Utah school that elected to tack on an additional fee, upping the increase to 8.5 percent.

The yearly cost is set to rise to $7,180 from this year's