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Judge says Smoky Canyon mine expansion can resume

BOISE (AP) — A federal judge says work preparing for the expansion of a southeastern Idaho phosphate mine can resume while a lawsuit over the expansion works its way through the courts.

The J.R. Simplot Co. wants to expand the Smoky Canyon mine into a roadless area near Yellowstone National Park. Last fall, the Greater Yellowstone Coalition sued to stop the expansion, contending the mine had sent selenium into local waters, poisoning livestock,

and that the expansion would create a major environmental disturbance.

But Simplot Company leaders said the work was environmentally sound and that without it, workers would lose jobs because the mine is nearly played out.

U.S. District Judge Mikel Williams ruled Wednesday that the Simplot company can resume preparatory work for the expansion on May 22. Meanwhile, the environmental groups are appealing that ruling, asking a federal appellate court to

keep the work on hold until the lawsuit is decided.