

Salazar seeks to end mine-waste dumping

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar has asked that a federal court vacate a rule allowing mining companies to dump waste near rivers and streams.

Salazar instructed the Justice Department to ask the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia to vacate the rule adopted in the waning days of the George W. Bush administration, The Washington Post reported Tuesday.

A 1983 law barring mine operators from dumping debris -- collected from shearing mountaintops to reach coal seams -- within 100 feet of an intermittent or permanent stream if the waste would harm water quality or reduce water flow.

Salazar said the Bush administration pushed through a rule allowing operators to dump the waste into stream beds "if it's found to be the cheapest and most convenient disposal option."

"We must responsibly develop our coal supplies to help us achieve energy independence, but we cannot do so without appropriately assessing the impact such development might have on local communities and natural habitat," he said in a statement.

Federal and state courts have issued conflicting interpretations of the law, and dumping continues, the Post said. Some environmentalists expressed disappointment in Salazar's announcement, saying more needs to be done and noting the federal government failed to enforce its mountaintop mining rules for years.

Copyright © 2009, by United Press International. All Rights Reserved.

Salazar seeks to end mine-waste dumping by UPI