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Coal titan plans giant Hoosier mine

Peabody's operation in Sullivan County will employ 350 workers

By Jeff Swiatek
Posted: March 19, 2009

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The largest coal-mining company in Indiana plans to open the biggest surface mine in the eastern U.S. in Sullivan County this year.

Peabody Energy didn't reveal the mine's size in acres but said it would cost \$350 million to \$400 million to develop. The St. Louis company said it is moving ahead with the project because it has signed contracts with customers committing them to buy almost half of the mine's estimated coal reserves of 200 million tons.

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"The value of these contracts enables us to move forward quickly" with the development of the mine, said Beth Sutton, a Peabody spokeswoman.

The coal buyers are Midwestern electric companies and co-ops and industrial companies, Peabody said. It wouldn't name customers.

Duke Energy is building a \$2 billion coal gasification power plant near Edwardsport, about 10 miles from the new mine.

About 350 people will work at the mine when it is operating at full capacity, the company said.

Peabody has nine operations in Southern Indiana, which lies in a coal-rich geographic area known as the Illinois Basin. Most are surface mines, where topsoil and rock are stripped away by huge excavators to get at the underlying coal.

Peabody has given the name Bear Run Mine to the new facility, which lies on ground it owns in the southeastern corner of Sullivan County, about 30 miles south of Terre Haute.

Peabody has most of the environmental and other regulatory approvals it needs to open the mine, Sutton said.

The state's largest environmental group, the Hoosier Environmental Council, has yet to decide whether it will get involved in the permitting process for the mine, said its executive director, Jesse Kharbanda.

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