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Voronezh Mine Project Could Get Public Scrutiny

By The Moscow Times

January 30, 2013

The fate of a controversial mining project in the Voronezh region could be put up for public discussion, Natural Resources and Environment Minister Sergei Donskoi said Wednesday.

Plans to mine nickel and copper at two deposits in the region may be taken to the ministry's public council, RIA Novosti reported.

"It may be [included in the public council's agenda]. I have definitely received this information, and we are checking everything," Donskoi told reporters.

"We all understand that this matter is very important," he said. "In any event, we will demand that the company meet all environmental standards, including those defined in the license."

The Ural Metals and Mining Co. won rights to the Yelanskoye and Yelinskoye nickel deposits

in May 2012.

"First, it needs to be understood what's going on, because if the company has delayed starting work, it could be because they want to do some additional assessments, including environmental ones," Donskoi said.

An alliance of environmentalists, local residents and Cossacks has been protesting the proposed project since last spring. Critics say the mining would contaminate agricultural land and threaten the Khoper River and a nearby nature reserve.

The matter is being reviewed by the Federal Agency for Regulation of Use of Natural Resources, the country's main environmental watchdog, Donskoi said.

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