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## Coal-mine opponents seek

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Opponents of a proposed underground coal mine that would span the Vermilion-Champaign County border gathered in Homer on Wednesday night to discuss ways to keep the mine from coming to the area.

Charles Goodall, a Sidell farmer and outspoken opponent of the mine, told the approximately 75 people who attended the meeting at Homer United Methodist Church that it's time for residents to act to protect the area's natural resources. One area resident asked the organizers of the meeting, which included the Prairie Rivers Network and private citizens, if the goal is to keep the mine from coming altogether or to ensure the mine abides by laws and regulations meant to protect natural resources.

Jonathan Ashbrook, a Homer-area resident, said the primary goal is to keep the mine from coming here. Sunrise Coal, based in Terre Haute, Ind., is the company pursuing the mine that would pull coal out of an area generally bordered by Homer, Fairmount, Broadlands, Allerton and Sidell. The company has already leased the mineral rights of thousands of acres in that area and declared it a mineable coal reserve, but has not yet applied to the state of Illinois for its mining permit.

As a result, much of the details about the proposed mine, including where it would get the large amount of water it would need on a daily basis and where runoff would be discharged, have not been made public, so opponents have had to speculate. And much speculation has focused on Homer, because village officials there spoke in a public meeting earlier this year about possibly providing Sunrise with water for the mine from the village's underground well and the nearby Salt Fork River.

That concerns the opponents who attended the June 13 meeting.

They question whether the mine's great need for water would negatively affect Homer's underground water well and private

underground wells in the area as well as the Salt Fork River and other waterways. They also question whether those water resources could be contaminated by permitted discharge from the mine, and in the future once a mine is closed, what type of waste could be deposited back into the mine as has been done in other mines in the state.

Some of the ideas they proposed for challenging the mine include highlighting endangered species in the area, pursuing a state or national designation for the Salt Fork River, and legally challenging the mineral leases that have already been signed. Traci Barkley with Prairie Rivers said some of the leases leave open the option of longwall mining rather than the room-and-pillar method.

The latter takes less of the coal reserve and leaves behind pillars of coal that support the surface as opposed to the former, which expects the ground above to collapse in areas.

Suzanne Jaworowski with Sunrise Coal said that's not accurate, and the company is not going to be longwall mining. She said the leases do not state that it's a longwall mine and do not leave open that option.

"We have said consistently from the beginning that it's a room-and-pillar, non-subsidence mine plan," she said. As for details about the water plan, Jaworowski would not discuss them but said the company's state permit application will have an overview of that plan, and the application has been submitted in hard-copy form but state officials have not yet looked at and need it in electronic form as well.

She said the company would be officially submitting its application and plans in electronic form in the next week or two.

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