

Company to drill 8 more test holes in search for rare earth minerals

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BILLINGS — An Arkansas company searching for rare earth minerals along the Montana-Idaho border could begin separating its findings in 2015 if ongoing tests remain positive.

U.S. Rare Earths said Tuesday it will bore eight more test holes on its Lemhi Pass property by Nov. 12 before shutting down for winter. The company will have bored 18 test holes across 25,000 acres in Western Montana and Idaho at the sites of the Last Chance Mine and the Idaho North Fork area.

Rare earth minerals are key ingredients in advanced electronics like cellular phones, wind turbines and hybrid car batteries. Of the 14 minerals in the category, nine are used in cellular phones. They're also heavily used by the defense industry. China produces nearly all of the rare earth minerals used in manufacturing, with U.S. mines producing roughly 1 percent of supply.

U.S. Rare Earths' findings support building concentration and partial separation plant to process Idaho and Montana minerals by 2015.

"Our goal all along is to be able to find, produce, separate and deliver a domestic supply so we erase the Chinese monopoly and create an option in the supply chain for the continental United States," said Kevin Cassidy, U.S. Rare Earths CEO.

Cassidy told the Billings Gazette the Montana and Idaho properties also contained high concentrations of critical rare earth oxides, minerals key to the development of sustainable energy projects.