

# Arkansas River central to alternate water plan

*Would require building a pipe from Fremont County*

By PAM ZUBECK THE GAZETTE

Colorado Springs could draw water from the Arkansas River in Fremont County and pipe it along state Route 115 under an alternate plan if it is not allowed to build its \$1 billion **Southern Delivery** System.

The city also would drill more wells and change how it draws from existing sources, according to the plan, given to U.S. Bureau of Reclamation officials Thursday.

The no-action plan, so named because it wouldn't require federal permits, was revised after federal officials said the original no-action plan submitted in 2004 fell short of supplying enough water through 2046.

The plan is one of seven alternatives under review by the bureau in a years-long process to determine the best way to slake Colorado Springs' thirst for the next 40 years.

The city prepared the no-action alternative because it was required by the agency; city officials hope they never have to resort to it.

The city's preferred method is called the **Southern Delivery** System. It would pump water from Pueblo Reservoir more than 40 miles to Jimmy Camp Creek Reservoir, yet to be built on the city's northeast side.

The pipeline would nearly double the amount of water available to Colorado Springs, but it has met with opposition from Pueblo-area officials. Objections center on the impacts to Fountain Creek, which flows from Colorado Springs to Pueblo.

The no-action alternative spells out Colorado Springs' plan for supplying water without using Pueblo Reservoir, an asset for which El Paso County taxpayers have paid taxes since 1959, funding 75 percent of its cost.

The original no-action plan proposed to recycle sewage to use as drinking water and drill 67 wells into the Denver Basin aquifer.

Recent analysis revealed groundwater drilling would produce less than thought, because the city's wells are at the aquifer's edge, where clay and other geologic formations hinder pumping.

To meet demand with groundwater, the city would have to drill 300 to 500 wells at a cost of \$1.2 billion, the noaction plan says. Such massive pumping could impact other wells and, in any case, the aquifer is a nonrenewable resource that ultimately will go dry.

The new proposal contains the following provisions:

c The city could pump water from the Lester and Atterbury ditch in Fremont County near Florence. This is the general location of a pipeline proposed by developer Mark Morley.

- Jimmy Camp Creek Reservoir would store water.

- A pipeline would follow state Route 115 and cut across the city to Jimmy Camp.

- A pipeline from the Fountain Valley Authority line from Pueblo Reservoir would be built to enable the city to use its full 12.8 million-gallons a-day allotment. Now, the city uses about 5 million gallons a day to serve the city's southwest side.

- Williams Creek Reservoir, about 10 miles south of Colorado Springs, would hold treated water until it was released into Fountain Creek in exchange for upstream water. Lakes Henry and Meredith near Rocky Ford would be used for the same purpose.

c The city would pull about 4.5 million gallons a day from 30 to 40 wells.

Keith Riley, Springs Utilities environmental services supervisor, noted the city prefers the Pueblo Reservoir pipeline. That's because pulling water from a river is unpredictable and operationally challenging.

"You can't always depend on a certain volume of water to be in the river," he said, "whereas out of a reservoir, your supply volume and quality is more consistent throughout the year."

Riley said the first no-action plan carried a price tag in 2006 dollars of \$2.1 billion, including construction, operation and maintenance through 2046.

Cost of the new no-action alternative is \$1.9 billion.

The **Southern Delivery** System, the city's choice, would cost \$1.7 billion.

Rewriting the no-action plan adds time to the permit process, though Bureau of Reclamation spokeswoman Kara Lamb wouldn't say how much.

"If it's this year, it would be late in the year," Lamb said.

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