

How about reused sewage as water source?

U.S. studying 6 options to city's proposed \$1 billion pipeline

By PAM ZUBECK THE GAZETTE

For decades, Colorado Springs has prided itself on pristine mountain snowmelt as its water source.

Now, the federal government wants to study recycling sewage as an alternative to Colorado Springs Utilities' proposed \$1 billion water pipeline project.

"The reuse alternative is currently under development, so we don't know what it will look like," Bureau of Reclamation spokeswoman Kara Lamb said. "But we do hope it will be a stand-alone alternative" to the **Southern Delivery** System.

The **Southern Delivery** System would pump water owned by Colorado Springs from Pueblo Reservoir to the northeast part of the city, increasing the system's capacity by a third.

Bureau officials are conducting an environmental-impact study of seven ways, including the pipeline, to satisfy Colorado Springs' water needs through the year 2046.

Those methods include a "no action" alternative, which originally contained a reuse component. Colorado Springs recently revised that plan, however, at the government's request after researchers determined Denver Basin groundwater supplies are insufficient to satisfy the city's future needs.

The new "no action" plan, submitted Jan. 24, did not include reuse.

Lamb said the bureau wants to mull reuse because some citizens asked that it be considered.

"We felt that from the results we had from public comments that it was very important to look at reuse and include it," she said.

Those favoring reuse live in Pueblo, said Colorado Springs Utilities spokesman Steve Berry. Pueblo government officials generally oppose the **Southern Delivery** System.

Berry said Utilities opposes reuse, which is generally defined as a 50/50 mix of treated effluent and fresh water that is treated again before being reused.

Reuse, he said, would cost about \$200 million more than the \$1 billion pipeline and would jeopardize the city's use of its water rights.

In addition, El Paso County taxpayers have pumped \$65 million into Pueblo Reservoir over the years. "That's an investment you don't want to pass up," Berry said.

Reuse traditionally is undertaken as a last resort after other water sources have been exhausted, he said, adding, "We haven't done that."

Although adding an alternative may prolong the approval process, Berry said there's time. The city doesn't need the pipeline until 2012.

"We want to come out of the (environmental study) process in a way that the process cannot be criticized as not being thorough," he said. "The more things get worked out, the more solid the process is in the end."

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