

Council OKs \$20K for study of pipeline project

## City looks at Green River for water

By PETE NICKEAS - Star-Tribune staff writer | Posted: Wednesday, February 10, 2010 12:00 am |

The Casper City Council has agreed to spend \$20,000 to study the feasibility of constructing a pipeline to carry water from the Green River Basin to the eastern slopes of Wyoming and Colorado.

The council's preliminary approval at Monday's work session means the proposal will be discussed before the council again at a formal meeting later this month.

Wyoming and Colorado each have about 250,000 acre feet of water flowing through the Green River Basin, according to a memo from the city attorney to City Manager Tom Forslund. Each acre foot equals about 325,000 gallons.

By comparison, Casper uses between 12,000 and 13,000 acre feet of water each year, according to Public Utilities Manager David Hill.

Casper could have more rights to water by transporting it from the basin and dumping it into the North Platte River, allowing the city to account for future growth. The study will be done to see if the project will be cost effective.

Casper is one of a handful of communities that could benefit from a pipeline transporting water from the basin to the eastern slopes of Wyoming and Colorado. A private investor is working on a similar plan, according to the memo.

The investor's plan spooked communities, where officials worried that private investment would allow those footing the construction costs of a pipeline to set water prices, according to Council Vice President Paul Bertoglio.

Harriet Hageman, a water attorney who works in Wyoming, Colorado and Nebraska, framed the issue as one of morality, with Casper and other cities and water districts preventing what should be a public resource from falling into private hands.

"It's the public water suppliers that are the ones doing [this project]," Hageman said. "When you are looking at privatizing water supplies, it's typically a for-profit enterprise. I'm a capitalist, I believe in for-profit, but when you're talking about public water supplies, especially of this magnitude, it's better situated in a public venue."

Putting \$20,000 into an account to later pay for a study doesn't obligate Casper to any construction costs, according to the memo.

Other local governments in Wyoming, including Laramie County and Torrington, have expressed an interest in the project, Hageman said.

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