

City wants \$200M from state for water system

By J.D. STETSON and CHRISTA MELAND , News-Record Writers

Gillette officials plan to ask the state for \$200 million for a new water pipeline that would provide a long-term solution to the dwindling water supply and help make the city a regional water supplier.

That's because the Wyoming Water Development Commission said it can't afford to pay for the initial stages of a requested 42-mile pipeline from the Madison well fields east of Gillette.

City Administrator Bret Jones said the city will work to develop relationships with the communities that will be affected by the regionalization plan — like Rozet and Moorcroft — before asking the Legislature for money during its 2009 session.

Meanwhile, officials will discuss the plan with county officials and the other communities that would benefit from the water supply.

"We're going to have to partner with those smaller communities," said Mayor Duane Evenson. "The better that we make that original presentation ... we are going to be money-ahead when we ask for that money."

The City Council gave preliminary approval Monday for a water supply agreement with Moorcroft, which gives the town a reduced rate for Gillette's water.

But while the ordinance specified that the agreement was for five years, Evenson proposed that the council change it to two years. He said it would force Moorcroft officials to come to the table sooner to negotiate their role in the \$200 million regional water project.

"It makes everyone want to play together," he said.

The commission earlier this month agreed to help Gillette with several smaller projects it requested money for — including one that will lay the groundwork for the pipeline project.

At a commission meeting, a \$100,000 funding request for a feasibility study to look at connecting three subdivisions southeast of Gillette morphed into a \$350,000 regional master plan to connect Moorcroft, Pine Haven, Rozet and several other subdivisions to city water. The commission will foot the entire bill for that plan — which needs to be completed before officials can ask the Legislature for the large appropriation.

Commission Director Michael K. Purcell said that if the commission is going to support the city's effort to seek state money, the pipeline project must benefit the entire region — hence the idea of making Gillette into a regional water supplier.

He said it's good economics to have a centralized system that eliminates smaller districts asking the state for money.

The commission also will pay for the redrilling of five in-town wells and for a fluoride removal study that the city is in the process of conducting.