

# Corps extends pipeline comment period

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GREEN RIVER -- For the second time, federal officials have extended the comment period for the controversial Million pipeline project proposed for southwest Wyoming.

The scoping comment period for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' environmental impact statement will now close Sept. 28, Corps project leader Rena Brand said Tuesday in a media release.

She said the extended comment period will allow the Corps additional time to respond to more than 40 requests for cooperating agency status from a variety of agencies and organizations, including Green River and Sweetwater County.

"The Corps intends to communicate with some entities on consolidating participation by appointing a single point of contact to represent multiple entities," Brand said.

Colorado entrepreneur Aaron Million is seeking a Corps permit to construct a private pipeline to divert water from the Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Sweetwater County and move it to eastern Wyoming and then on to Colorado's bustling Front Range.

The pipeline would deliver about 250,000 acre feet of water each year, according to plans for the estimated \$3 billion project.

The states, not the Army Corps, grants water rights. The Million Conservation Resource Group applied to the Corps for a permit under the terms of the Clean Water Act, which triggers the federal EIS process.

Million's proposed Regional Watershed Supply Project would make a new water supply available for use by municipalities, agriculture and industries in southeast Wyoming and on Colorado's Front Range.

Under the proposal, two water withdrawal facilities would be used, one on the east side of the Flaming Gorge Reservoir and the other on the east bank of the Green River -- approximately 200 feet downstream of the Seedskadee National Wildlife Refuge.

The company estimates removing a total of approximately 165,000 acre feet of water from the reservoir and about 85,000 acre feet from the river each year.

The water pipeline system to be constructed would be approximately 578 miles in length, according to plans. The pipe's diameter would range from 72 to 120 inches.

The proposed pipeline would extend from the two withdrawal points in southwest Wyoming to southeast Wyoming, to the Front Range and then to Colorado Springs and Pueblo, Colo.

## Local opposition

In April, the Corps oversaw a contentious public hearing in Green River to begin the EIS process. The meeting drew several hundred area residents.

Residents at the Green River meeting were very vocal in their nearly unanimous outrage for the project.

In May, the Corps extended the scoping comment period until July 27 so that an additional public meeting could be held in June at Rock Springs. That meeting drew another 100 people, who also were mostly against the proposal.

Million told residents at both meetings that drawing water from the reservoir -- which can hold

approximately 3.8 million acre feet -- and the river could be done while protecting recreation, endangered fish and downstream users.

But locals contended the project would hurt local businesses in the area, would curtail future growth in Green River and neighboring Rock Springs and could threaten the world-class fisheries on the river and in the gorge.

Last week, Rock Springs council members voted to join a coalition with Green River and the county that aims to fight Million's proposal.

The three governmental entities allocated a combined \$450,000 to the Communities Protecting the Green River coalition for the effort, which officials said may include litigation.

Additionally, the county and Green River are seeking cooperating agency status as part of the Corps' environmental impact statement process. Corps officials predicted the draft EIS could be released as early as 2012, with a final permit decision taking up to five years.

In written comments submitted to the Corps last week, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said it was opposed to the Million project plan.

Service officials said the agency's concerns focused on how the pipeline would affect threatened or endangered species, migratory birds and habitats, and the overall ecosystem balance.

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