

# ***EIS planned for Flaming Gorge pipeline***

Posted: Wednesday, Apr 1st, 2009

BY: Joy Ufford

Green River water is being targeted by a Colorado entrepreneur who wants to pipe his state's unappropriated water 560 miles from Flaming Gorge along I-80 to southeastern Wyoming and the Front Range.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) recently published its notice of intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the proposal by Aaron Million, of the Million Conservation Resource Group (MCRG), to build the proposed "Regional Watershed Supply Project" (RWSP) and pull about 250,000 acre-feet of new water a year to his customers.

The planned EIS will "analyze the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of a proposed water-supply project in Wyoming and Colorado," states the ACE notice.

The Green, which springs from its source in the Wind River Range, apparently has as-yet unused water available for both Wyoming and Colorado. It is the Colorado River's major tributary and

"The water would be obtained from the Green River Basin as part of the unused portion of water allocated to the states of Wyoming and Colorado under the Upper Colorado River Compact," the ACE notice states.

The Upper Colorado River Compact of 1948 allocated 50,000 acre-feet a year to Arizona, then apportioned 51.75 percent to Colorado, 14 percent to Wyoming, 11.25 percent to New Mexico and 23 percent to Utah.

Million's private water-development company, MCRG, would build, own and operate the pipeline and facilities for an estimated \$4 billion.

"The potential water users for the proposed project would include agriculture, municipalities and industries in southeastern Wyoming and the Front Range of Colorado," the ACE notice states. "In Wyoming, approximately 25,000 acre-feet of water would be delivered annually to users in the Platte River Basin. The remaining 225,000 acre-feet of water would be delivered annually to the South Platte River and Arkansas basins in Colorado."

It also explains Million has proposed diversion with two "water withdrawal facilities" – one on the east side of Flaming Gorge Reservoir and the other about 200 feet downstream from Seedskaadee National Wildlife Refuge on the Green's east bank.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation would have to give Million a contract to withdraw water directly from Flaming Gorge and he would also need federal approval to cross public lands with the pipeline.

The proposal also includes a water storage treatment reservoir near the Green River intake system, a water pipeline from 72 to 102 inches in diameter and about 560 miles long, a regulating reservoir at the pipeline's western end, about 16 natural gas-powered pump stations along the pipeline route, temporary and permanent access roads and three water-storage/flow-regulation reservoirs (at Lake Hattie west of Laramie and the proposed Cactus Hill and T-Cross reservoirs in Colorado).

Outlet structures at each reservoir would have water treatment facilities, onsite transformers, overhead power lines and water delivery systems to his water users, it says.

## Wyoming permits

Million applied to the Wyoming State Engineer's Office (SEO) for two permits, 15 months ago, which are still under review and will likely bring about public hearings and comment periods, according to State Engineer Pat Tyrrell.

One is to divert water from the Green and the other is to use his proposed pipeline for Wyoming water use, Tyrrell said. The water sold to Wyomingites would count against the state's apportionment, he added, just as the water piped to Colorado customers would count toward that state's historic allocation.

While the SEO permit to withdraw water does not require an environmental analysis or public hearings, the proposal is

sensitive enough that the SEO plans to schedule meetings later this summer or fall, he said.

“They were told from early on we would probably have hearings because of the size, nature and potential controversy that surrounds (the diversion and pipeline proposed),” he said.

Million has proposed four points for withdrawal to the SEO – three in the Green and one on the banks of Flaming Gorge.

“We’re getting a lot of questions,” Tyrrell said. “There are concerns – can it be done without hindering Wyoming’s remainder of (its) portion?”

Wyoming’s role is choosing whether or not to grant the two requested permits ‘is “only a smaller part of the much larger approval process,” he said. “We would be one domino in a much larger string.”

Even assuming the SEO approved his permits, Tyrrell added, “That’s no green light for (Million).”

The concept is “allowable” – but the project’s size is very “unusual,” he said.

### Local meetings

This month, the Army Corps of Engineers will conduct public scoping meetings to describe the project, preliminary alternatives and NEPA compliance.

ACE meetings in Wyoming will be held in Green River April 14, 6:30 to 9 p.m., at the Green River High School and April 16, 6:30 to 9 p.m. in Laramie at the Laramie High School.

The public is invited to provide scoping input and comments through May 19. The notice is available at <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/20#89F78>.

Address questions and comments on the proposal and EIS to Ms. Rena Brand, Project Manager, US Army Corps of Engineers, Denver Regulatory Office, 9307 S. Wadsworth Blvd., Littleton, CO 80128-6901; (303) 979-4120; [mrcg.eis@usace.army.mil](mailto:mrcg.eis@usace.army.mil).

The Upper Green River Basin Joint Powers Board, representing Sublette, Lincoln and Sweetwater counties, has invited a coalition of concerned Wyoming and Colorado groups to meet but hasn’t “managed to nail down a date yet,” said board member Randy Bolgiano of Boulder.

The Wyoming Water Development Commission has scheduled an April 30 meeting with the Green River Basin Advisory Group and the coalition, 6 p.m. at the White Mountain Library in Rock Springs, to discuss the Million proposal.