

## Hundreds gather at GRHS to protest proposed transbasin pipeline



MEL PALMER expresses some anger toward developer Aaron Million about Million's proposed water pipeline from the Flaming Gorge Reservoir to Colorado. Star photo by Jack Smith

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Residents from all over Sweetwater County united Tuesday night at Green River High School to show opposition for a planned pipeline to pump water from the Flaming Gorge and Green River 560 miles to the Front Range of Colorado.

A meeting in which the Army Corps of Engineers had intended to put up informative displays of the proposal and receive written comments, instead turned into an angry community showing disapproval.

At one point during the meeting, in a show of unison Green River Mayor Hank Castillon, Rock Springs Mayor Tim Kaumo and Sweetwater County Commission Chair Debby Dellai-Boese all stood before the crowd and showed strong opposition. One by one, each local leader stood up and protested the proposal and received loud cheers from the crowd.

Rena Brand, project manager for the Corps, said a group has put forward a proposal, and they have decided it needs to go through the highest level of review. They also need to start the process for an Environmental Impact Statement.

Brand said this is a time for the public to put forth written comments on the issue. She said the Corps of Engineers is working with the BLM, Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife and several other entities on the proposal.

The first scheduled EIS draft could be available to the public in 2012, and according to Brand a record of decision could be made in 2014. She said the Army Corps of Engineers is neither a proponent or opponent of the issue.

Aaron Million, who presented the proposal to the Army Corps of Engineers, briefly addressed the standing-room-only crowd about his intentions.

He originally came up with the idea at Colorado State University and for the past 3 years he and his team

have been working with some of the best water teams in the United States.

Million said this would move some of Colorado's allocated water to Colorado and there has also been interest in the water in other parts of Wyoming.

According to the Army Corps of Engineers, the project is designed to provide approximately 250,000 acre-feet of water per year. It would be delivered in a pipeline which would extend from two division points in Wyoming.

He went on to say Utah is doing something similar to this.

#### Outpour of Concern

After Brand started the meeting with a brief set of comments, several residents began to express their concerns.

One by one residents expressed concerns over the impacts on such things as fisheries, water quality and the group being a private entity.

Brand finally stopped the discussion despite a strong opposition from the crowd, who voiced their displeasure throughout the proceedings.

Western Wyoming Professor Craig Thompson stood up and expressed several points to the audience.

"Mr. Million gets the last allocation of Colorado water, and we get the shaft," Thompson said.

He also expressed concern about the pipeline causing an increase in both the salinity and nutrients in the water.

Thompson said unless Million can predict the future for 30 years, he thinks he should kill this as quick as he can. Thompson said Million should look to get the water from the Yampa River in Colorado and fight with the residents of Western Colorado. Soon after Thompson was done voicing his concern he received a huge ovation as if he was speaking what was on everyone's minds.

Rock Springs resident Reid West said he feels this is a bit of divide and conquer and he doesn't know why we have to suffer.

Shortly after listening to Million and comments from concerned residents, State Rep. Stan Blake said he is totally opposed to the proposal with his biggest problem being this is a private entity profiting from our public water.

Both Blake and Boese agreed this is just the beginning.

"We need to keep up the fight the whole way," Blake said.

When speaking to the crowd, Boese urged the audience to do more.

"We need to get together and fight for our land," Boese said.

One local resident may have summed up the feelings for most of the crowd as he quickly left the high school before he could be identified.

As he left, the man could be heard saying that he told Million, "You may be a hero on the other side of the Continental Divide, but you are not one here."