

Madison pipeline money measure heads to House floor

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The Madison pipeline bill heads to the House floor later this week for a first vote, after clearing the House Appropriations Committee on Tuesday.

The bill has to pass three readings in the House before it can become law. It already has won approval in the Senate.

If it passes, the bill will provide \$16.8 million in grants and loans that will get the first phase of building the second, 42-mile-long Madison formation pipeline off the ground.

The money is enough to get the planning and land acquisition for the project started and just as importantly, it buys time to do the really hard work of figuring out how to pay for the rest of the \$226 million project.

Gillette soon will have to begin the difficult work of convincing the state to come up with two-thirds of the total cost of the project. The city will then have to pay the remaining one third of the cost, as required by state water development laws.

Gillette Mayor Duane Evenson has said in the past that it is possible the city will have to exact a facilities tax against residents, as well as raise water rates to put them more in line with other communities. Gillette's water rates are some of the lowest in the state.

Evenson, who was in Cheyenne again Tuesday, said that in many ways, this was just the beginning of the fight for the Madison. But he also said the relationships that the city has built over the last several years with the Wyoming Water Development Commission are strong and will help to get the rest of the project moving.

"The last seven years we've spent building relationship and working with the WWDC appear to be working," he said.

The water commission has supported the bill throughout the Legislature.

Rep. Mark Semlek, R-Moorcroft, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, voted for the bill Tuesday but said "the devil is in the details."

"The regionalization aspect of this will manifest itself in unseen ways," he said. "It will be interesting to see what the boundaries are, what unincorporated areas and incorporated areas it might contain."

He said that Moorcroft has had some "experiences" trying to make the existing Madison pipeline "regional" and that process had not necessarily worked for Moorcroft residents as well as it worked for Gillette.

"These are the things that will have to be addressed by the joint powers board for this project," he said.

State water officials have said that the second Madison pipeline must be part of a regional water system that will serve an as-yet-undecided area in the Moorcroft/Pine Haven/Gillette area.