

No time to lose on water pipeline

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The clock is ticking now that the state Legislature has voted to give Gillette enough money to start the second Madison water pipeline project.

One of the big selling points for the \$226 million project was that Gillette's projected population growth would outstrip the city's available water supply if the project was not ready to deliver water by 2017, only eight years from now.

Time is tight because the 42-mile-long pipeline is projected to take four to eight years to complete.

While city officials have said they hope to complete the project in four to six years instead of eight, the current economic situation in both Wyoming and the state makes doing so less certain than it was just a few months ago.

Even more than before, it means there's no time to lose, Mayor Duane Evenson said.

"By the end of next week, we hope to begin to send out letters asking to hear back from those qualified parties that might be interested in doing the project," Evenson said.

The huge project is being eyed by engineering firms across the country, he said.

The engineering firm selected by the city also must be approved by the Wyoming Water Development Commission, because the money for the project is administered by the state, Evenson said.

"They have the expertise doing these projects so they will have huge input into who we choose," he said.

The Legislature agreed in early March to give Gillette \$11.2 million toward the first phase of the project and to set up a \$5.5 million loan that the city will have to pay back.

The regional water study outcome is considered integral to the future of the project, because the Legislature was very clear that there will be no more money coming from the state unless Campbell County participates in the project. The study will recommend different boundary options for the service area and give the city and county some alternatives on how to manage the project.

State water officials also have said the project must be included in a regional water system in order to get their approval.

Evenson and City Administrator Mike Muirhead also are considering asking the City Council for one or two full-time city employees, probably to oversee the project administration and other duties. Just keeping up with bill payment is a full-time job, Evenson said.

"We need someone out there to be the eyes and ears of the project," he said.

The entire \$226 million project will cost the city about \$75 million and the state about \$151 million, under a one third/two-thirds cost share formula designed for water projects.

MADISON PIPELINE TIMELINE

- **Next week:** City will begin to send out "Requests For Interest" letters to the engineering companies the city and the Wyoming Water Development Commission believe might be interested in and capable of

doing the project.

- **April 10:** Responses to the Letters of Interest are due back to the city.

- **Mid-April:** The city and state will decide which of the responses they think are the best suited for the project and will send those companies detailed requests for a project proposal.

- **July 1:** The \$16.8 million is released by the state. A company has been chosen to do the project. Work will begin on a contract to hire the company and to acquire the property needed for the project.

- **July-August:** Regional water study is done. Talks could begin with the county on cost sharing options. One option is the county pays for part of the project in return for a certain volume of water. But it's too early to tell exactly how the county will be involved, Evenson said.

- **Dec. 31:** An updated estimate of the project's design costs, the new pumping station and more details are available. This cost estimate is needed in order to be ready for next year's Legislative budget session, when the city will ask the state for more money for the \$226 million project. "By then, we'll have done a test well, we'll know the volume of water to expect, we'll know the exact costs, so we can be ready to go for the winter session," Evenson said.