

Corps will use public reaction to water proposal as part of environmental impact statement

## Pipeline comments pour in

By JEFF GEARINO - Southwest Wyoming bureau | Posted: Wednesday, February 17, 2010 12:00 am |

See the Army Corps of Engineers' scoping report on the proposed water pipeline at [www.nwo.usace.army.mil](http://www.nwo.usace.army.mil)

GREEN RIVER -- Not surprisingly, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers received thousands of comments about entrepreneur Aaron Million's proposal to build a pipeline from the Green River in southwest Wyoming to Colorado's Front Range.

Corps officials said 30 categories of significant issues were weeded from the bevy of public comments. Those issues will be the focus of the agency's environmental impact statement on the project.

Army Corps EIS project manager Rena Brand announced Tuesday the availability of the summary scoping report for the Regional Watershed Supply Project EIS.

She said the information gained during the public scoping period -- which ended in September -- will assist the agency in identifying the potential environmental issues and will help narrow the focus of the EIS analysis to areas of high interest and concern.

The Army Corps is overseeing the environmental study of the proposed 560-mile-long pipeline, which could carry up to 250,000 acre feet of water a year from the Green River, in the Flaming Gorge Reservoir area near Wyoming's border with Utah.

Brand said the agency received 1,531 comment submittals during the six-month scoping period.

She said 571 comments were also recorded during the nine open house-style public scoping meetings held in April and June.

From these, 7,409 "substantive" comments were obtained.

Summary comments were divided into two major topics, including EIS process/permitting issues and resource-specific issues.

Identified issues include, among others, concerns about the water withdrawal aspects of the project, the construction and maintenance of the water transport systems, and the mitigation or remediation actions planned for the project.

Private project

The proposed \$3 billion pipeline would be privately funded.

The pipeline would run east across Wyoming and then south to Pueblo, Colo., according to plans.

Although the water would be pumped out of the Green River and the Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Wyoming, the water would be generated from Colorado's share under the Upper Colorado River Basin compact, which allocates the river's water among seven western states.

Million's proposal met with stiff opposition from Sweetwater County and southwest Wyoming-area residents during public scoping meetings in April at Green River.

Green River, Rock Springs and Sweetwater County officials banded together and formed a coalition last year to fight the pipeline proposal.

Residents and local municipal officials contend the privately funded project water diversion project would have no real benefit for southwest Wyoming, could hurt local industry and tourism efforts, could curtail future growth in the county and could threaten a world-class fishery.

Gov. Dave Freudenthal has also expressed opposition to the project.

In his written comments to the Corps, the governor said the need for the project isn't clearly defined and that the EIS study needed to consider how taking water from the river would affect recreation and endangered species.

Two withdrawal points

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

Million company officials said the group has lined up customers for water both in southeast Wyoming and Colorado, including municipal users and agriculture interests.

The company is proposing to construct two water withdrawal facilities, 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 total estimated annual volumes from the two diversion points would be approximately 165,000 acre feet from the Flaming Gorge Reservoir and 85,000 acre feet from the Green River during a dry year, according to the Army Corps scoping report.

The Green River volumes would increase to approximately 157,000 acre feet in an average year and 195,000 acre feet in a wet year.

Million officials estimate the pipeline could be built within two years of the final study's completion. The Army Corps estimated the EIS process could take up to five years to complete.

Brand said the next phase of the study involves the Corps' review and verification of potential water customers and water needs that were submitted by MCRG.

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