

## **Pipeline plan would divert water from Green**

**Some worry effects could be felt all the way to the headwaters of drainage.**

*By Cory Hatch Jackson Hole, Wyo.*

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A proposed pipeline that would take billions of gallons of water from the Green River basin each year has conservation groups worried about its effects on recreation and potential for encouraging new dams.

The 560-mile-long, 10-foot-tall pipeline would carry most of its capacity – 81.4 billion gallons per year – from western Wyoming over the Continental Divide to the Denver and Colorado Springs areas. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers held the first meeting on the proposal Tuesday night in Green River.

Steve Jones, a watershed attorney with the Wyoming Outdoor Council, said the project could rekindle interest in the construction of dams in the Green River basin. Close to Jackson Hole, it is a haven for anglers and their guides as well as antelope hunters and others.

“There are folks that have been agitating to build a lot of water storage in the Upper Green,” he said. “I would hate to see this proposal give any impetus for those ideas. I like the streams and rivers in Sublette County the way they are.”

In the past, dams have been proposed on the Green above the Warren Bridge near Daniel, along the western foot of the Wind River Range, and along the eastern flank of the Wyoming Range. Jones said he worries that the pipe plan, if implemented, would affect wildlife and fish populations.

“Obviously, if you’re going to take 250,000 acre feet, that is going to affect riparian areas along the Green River and the Flaming Gorge Reservoir,” he said. “Fish species, in general, are going to be impacted by the lower water flows. You’re going to impact the cottonwood growth along the Green River, and that is going to impact avian habitat.

Diverting water to Colorado would affect ospreys, eagles, trout, moose, Kokanee salmon, trumpeter swans and other water-dependant species. The proposed pipeline would run through sage grouse habitat and be deleterious to that troubled bird.

Jones said the developer, Aaron Million, hasn’t provided enough details to reassure people that the water would even get used.

“Right now, Aaron Million doesn’t have any customers,” he said. “How do we know that there’s any ... money in this thing that will drive the project to go forward?”

Jonathan Ratner, a representative of the Western Watersheds Project, said even if the plan were viable, it does society no good to encourage the overpopulation of areas with insufficient water supplies.

“We have a totally unsustainable system,” he said. “You can’t have unlimited population growth in areas where the water supply can’t support it.”

There are a number of fish protected by the Endangered Species Act that could be affected by the project including the razorback sucker, Colorado pikeminnow, humpback chub and bonytail, Ratner said.

The potential reduction in fishing and hunting resources in southwest Wyoming as a result of a diversion could hit the economy there, said Mac Blewer, grassroots organizer for Audubon Wyoming.

“Recreation is such a huge money-maker in southwest Wyoming, it could have an impact on that,” he said. “This proposal does not even scratch the surface on addressing those impacts.”

Steve Freudenthal, an attorney for Million and Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal’s brother, said it is too soon to criticize a project that is in the early stages of the National Environmental Policy Act process.

“I think that this is sort of the typical getting the cart before the horse,” he said. “The very issues that these folks are talking about need to go into the scope of the [environmental impact statement] so that we can do a fair analysis as to whether this project makes sense or not.

“People should not be jumping to conclusions one way or the other,” he said. “What they should do is identify their

concerns so they get a fair analysis.”

Gov. Freudenthal has expressed skepticism about the plan.

People who wish to comment on the proposal can do so by mail to Ms. Rena Brand, Regulatory Specialist, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Omaha District, Denver Regulatory Office, 9307 S. Wadsworth Blvd., Littleton, CO 80128 or by e-mail to [MCRG.EIS@usace.army.mil](mailto:MCRG.EIS@usace.army.mil).