

Potential harm to Wyoming users may affect potential diversion projects



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Several obstacles may stand in the way of Aaron Million's proposed Flaming Gorge water diversion project.

At a public information meeting Monday conducted by the Communities Protecting the Green River, Steve Wolff of the Wyoming State Engineer's Office discussed several of the issues that may hamper Million's or any other future diversion projects.

Currently, under the 1922 Colorado River Compact, the state of Colorado is allocated 51 percent of the river's water. According to Wolff, the state of Colorado has yet to determine how much of the allocation they are currently using.

He said a study is currently underway to determine Colorado's use and what they have left to allocate to other entities.

Although the study is not complete, he did say the assumption currently is that they do have water

COMMUNITIES PROTECTING THE Green River committee members Don Hartley, Ron Hughes and Paula Wonnacott prepare for a public information meeting Monday. Star photo by Jack H. Smith

remaining under their allocation.

Million's proposed pipeline is asking to divert an average of \$250,000 acre feet a year of water from the Green River Basin to the Front Range of Colorado and Southeast Wyoming.

Wolff said the proposed points of diversion are the the Flaming Gorge Reservoir and the Green River upstream of Flaming Gorge.

While Wolff said the Colorado River Compacts states that Wyoming cannot prevent Colorado from obtaining their allocated water, he did say the state engineer's office can deny a permit it would cause existing harm to Wyoming users.

He added his office can use Wyoming water law to make the decision if Wyoming users are being harmed.

Several in attendance at the meeting discussed potential harms that could come from both water levels and water salinity.

Another point of concern discussed at the meeting were "end users" Million had to identify to the Army Corp of Engineers.

Wolff said all the Corp has received as far as "end users" were letters from people saying they "were interested in water."

A LONG PROCESS

The Army Corp of Engineers is currently drafting an Environmental Impact Statement on the project.

The EIS is required because of the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act.

According to Sweetwater County Commissioner and Communities Protecting the Green River Chairperson Paula Wonnacott the process will take until 2014.

Wolff said his office cannot make a decision about the pipeline until this is done, and it may take longer.

"It is a process," Wonnacott said. "This is a marathon, not a sprint."

While Wonnacott said it was Aaron Million is what "brought us to this point," he is not the only one interested in local water.

Just weeks after a scoping hearing was conducted in Green River dealing with Million's proposed project, Frank Jaeger of the Parker, Colo., Water and Sanitation District approached local leaders with a similar proposal.

PROTECTING THE GREEN

At the meeting, Green River Mayor Hank Castillon gave a detailed breakdown of the committee and also asked the public for their help into the future.

"You are the ones who can help," Castillon said.

The Committee is currently made up of five local residents.

Along with Castillon and Wonnacott, it also includes Solvay Chemicals Site Manager Ron Hughes, Rocky Mountain Power Customer and Community Manager Craig Nelson and retired former coal miner Don Hartley, who also serves on the Upper Green River Joint Powers Board.

Castillon said the committee will be broken down into seven subcommittees.

Those include committees for media, business and industry, legal, government, Green River Basin organizations, recruiting and a finance committee.