

Water pipeline idea interests irrigation districts

By BEN NEARY - Associated Press writer | Posted: Friday, January 22, 2010 12:00 am |

CHEYENNE -- The following entities have written letters expressing interest in getting annual deliveries of water from a proposed pipeline that would carry water from the Green River in southwestern Wyoming to Colorado's Front Range:

- Central Colorado Water Conservancy District and its subdistricts, headquartered in Greeley, Colo.,: up to 150,000 acre feet.
- Cheyenne Board of Public Utilities: from 3,500 to 5,500 acre feet by the year 2040.
- City of Brighton, Colo.: up to 12,000 acre feet.
- Douglas County, Colo.,: up to 40,000 acre feet.
- East Larimer County Water District: Up to 5,000 acre feet.
- Fort Collins-Loveland Water District: up to 5,000 acre feet.
- Larimer and Weld Irrigation Co.: up to 20,000 acre feet.
- Lower South Platte Water Conservancy District in Montrose, Colo.,: up to 35,000 acre feet.
- Norris Ranches (T-Cross Ranches, Norris Cattle Inc. in Colorado Springs): up to 20,000 acre feet.<

CHEYENNE -- Representatives of some of the Colorado municipalities and irrigation districts interested in drawing water from a proposed pipeline from Wyoming say they need more water regardless of the source.

Some potential customers say they don't necessarily endorse the pipeline project, which faces stiff opposition in Wyoming.

Aaron Million of Fort Collins, Colo., has applied to pipe up to 250,000 acre feet of water a year from the Green River in southwestern Wyoming and down the Front Range as far as Pueblo, Colo.

Although it would be drawn from Wyoming, the water would come from Colorado's allocated share of water in the Colorado River system set by established river management compacts. The Green River is a tributary to the Colorado River.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is overseeing an environmental study of the pipeline proposal. The agency gave Million a deadline of this week to prove there's a need for the project before it would proceed with the study.

In response, Million on Wednesday filed letters from local water entities in Colorado and Wyoming interested in getting water. He said their total needs exceed 300,000 acre feet a year and prove the pipeline is necessary.

An acre foot is the amount of water that covers an acre to a depth of 1 foot, or about 325,000 gallons.

Million said Thursday that he wouldn't characterize the entities' statements of interest in getting water as endorsements of the pipeline.

"There's a lot of the water users that have several options for water supply," Million said. "And as they're looking at alternatives in the region, this is one alternative for that water supply. And really that's all it is. Some entities don't have many alternatives."

Mike DiTullio, general manager Fort Collins-Loveland Water District, said Thursday his district serves 15,000 customers and ultimately could use another 10,000 acre feet of water. The district's letter submitted to the Corps of Engineers expresses interest in securing an additional 5,000 acre feet per year.

"We're interested in any water project that could bring water into northern Colorado," DiTullio said. "It doesn't have to be (Million's); we're into any of them. We think that water is just an essential ingredient for the health and welfare of northern Colorado and Wyoming."

Tim Murrell, Douglas County water resources planner in Castle Rock, Colo., said Thursday that the county's letter expressing the need for up to 40,000 acre feet of water doesn't indicate support or opposition to the pipeline project.

"It wasn't interest in this water," Murrell said of the county's letter. "It was a statement that we would need a certain amount of water from some source."

Clint Bassett, spokesman for the Cheyenne Board of Public Utilities, said Thursday that Wyoming's capital city is always looking for more future water resources, regardless of the source.

"We would be looking at developing or requiring an additional 3,500 to 5,500 acre feet of water by the year 2040," Bassett said.

Meanwhile, Mayor Hank Castillon of Green River said Wednesday that his city is working with the city of Rock Springs and the Sweetwater County government to oppose the pipeline project. Each of the local governments has put up \$150,000 to hire a lawyer to fight it.

Castillon said pulling the water out of the Green River would hurt fishing, tourism and the local economy. "(We) want to keep Wyoming water in Wyoming," he said.

Rena Brand, project manager for the Corps of Engineers in Littleton, Colo., said her agency intends to issue a draft environmental impact statement on the pipeline proposal in 2012 and a final report in 2014.