

Water pipeline moves ahead

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Gillette is one step closer to securing \$25 million for Madison Water Project design to meet the demand for water in the city's 30-year growth forecast.

Senate File 36 passed its third reading in the House on Tuesday afternoon on a 47-9 vote with four representatives excused.

But the bill has several more steps to hurdle before it's official, said Rep. Tom Lubnau, R-Gillette.

It didn't sweep through both legislative bodies untouched. Some amendments were added to the water bill to change grammar and add details about a repayment plan.

The amendments came from debate in the House, he said.

Lubnau said representatives from the state's agricultural counties were worried about the repayments from the water account that the money would come from.

The money in that account is meant for building dams.

Campbell County's delegates feared the repayment matter, along with some attitudes that Gillette should pay for its water project, would mount into a sentiment against the bill, Lubnau said.

"(There were) twice as many no votes in the House this year as last year. ... The budget is a lot tighter in Cheyenne than it was last year."

State Sen. John Hines, R-Gillette, who sponsored the bill, said the amendments didn't amount to anything major.

Because of those amendments, the bill will be voted on again by the Senate in a conference committee Wednesday.

"It has every reason to pass in the Senate," Lubnau said.

If the water bill passes, it will move to Gov. Dave Freudenthal's desk for approval, perhaps by the end of the week.

If it doesn't pass in the Senate conference committee, it will go on to another conference committee.

"If we cannot work out a compromise twice, the bill dies," Lubnau wrote in an e-mail.

If it's worked out, the bill will be voted on, again, in both houses.

Gillette's Madison Water Project will build a 42-mile long pipeline to connect to the Madison aquifer near Pine Haven, essentially duplicating the existing line. It will deliver water to Gillette and other communities in the region.

The \$25 million will allow the city to move forward on phase two of the project, which will involve the internal workings of the pipeline, City Administrator Mike Muirhead said.

The total cost of the second pipeline is estimated to be \$226 million, and the actual bidding and construction of the project should be complete by 2016.

If the bill passes, the City of Gillette would get the money July 1, Lubnau said.