

Water project talks continue

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GREEN RIVER -- Southwest Wyoming residents will get another chance to voice their concerns -- or support -- for Colorado entrepreneur Aaron Million's controversial project to divert water from the Flaming Gorge Reservoir to the Front Range around Denver, federal officials said.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced Tuesday a second meeting for Sweetwater County residents next month on Million's proposed Regional Watershed Supply Project.

Army Corps project manager Rena Brand said the agency will host the second public scoping meeting on the transbasin diversion project June 9 in Rock Springs.

Previous meetings were held in April in Green River and Laramie, but many of the residents attending the Green River meeting criticized the Army Corps for only scheduling one meeting in southwest Wyoming on the proposal.

Agency officials said earlier this month they were also extending the written public comment period for an environmental impact statement through July 27.

The Million Conservation Resource Group is proposing to construct a transbasin diversion pipeline to move water from southwest Wyoming's Green River Basin to the Front Range north of Denver.

The approximately 560-mile-long pipeline would run from the Flaming Gorge Reservoir, along Interstate 80 and then south to Colorado's Front Range and on to Colorado Springs. The \$3 billion pipeline would deliver about 250,000 acre feet of water each year.

The proposed Regional Watershed Supply Project would also provide an additional water source for southeast Wyoming, according to company plans.

A hostile crowd of around 300 people greeted Million and Army Corps officials at the first public scoping meeting April 14 in Green River.

The handful of area residents who were allowed to speak at the meeting overwhelmingly opposed the unique, privately funded water diversion project.

Residents said diverting much-needed water from the reservoir could hurt local industry, could curtail future growth in Green River and Rock Springs, would threaten a world-class fishery and would have no real benefits for southwest Wyoming.

But some officials attending the Laramie meeting said they would welcome the approximately 25,000 acre-feet of water that would be delivered annually to southeast Wyoming users in the Platte River Basin under Million's pipeline proposal.

At a city workshop May 12, Green River, Rock Springs, Sweetwater County and other municipal officials agreed to form a coalition -- and perhaps hire a public relations firm -- to fight Million's pipeline proposal.

Officials decided the best way to oppose the project was to present some sort of "united front" that would include an aggressive, proactive campaign against the project.

Officials also decided to press the Army Corps for another meeting in Sweetwater County and said they would consider litigation if necessary to try and kill the project.

The Corps' EIS is expected to take three years or longer to complete, Brand estimated.

More information about the project can be found on the Corps' Web site at www.nwo.usace.

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