

Wyoming Gov. Mead blasts proposed water pipeline

By **BEN NEARY** The Associated Press | Posted: Saturday, December 17, 2011 12:00 pm

CHEYENNE — Gov. Matt Mead submitted comments to federal regulators on Friday blasting a proposed pipeline that would carry water from the Green River in Wyoming to Colorado's Front Range.

"This project would cut a vast swath across southern Wyoming, with the potential for huge impacts in many significant sectors of our economy and aspects of critical resources to Wyoming and Colorado," Mead wrote.

Fort Collins, Colo., businessman Aaron Million has applied to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for preliminary approval of a pipeline that would stretch more than 500 miles from Flaming Gorge Reservoir, on the Wyoming-Utah border, as far south as Pueblo, Colo.

Monday is the comment deadline on the project.

Million has separate permit applications pending with Wyoming state government seeking up to 250,000 acre feet of water a year. He has said he's seeking water that Colorado is entitled to under the Colorado River Compact, an agreement among Western states over how to allocate water in the river and its tributaries.

Mead, in his comments to FERC, states that he and many Wyoming citizens with expertise in water and power issues have grave concerns about Million's project. The governor said he doesn't believe FERC should be considering it in the first place.

Million shifted his application to FERC from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers earlier this year. He has said that turbines on the pipeline would generate some electricity to offset some but not all the energy demands of pumping.

"Although in its proposal a hydroelectricity angle has been attempted, it is important to note that hydroelectric production is a minor purpose of the project," Mead wrote. "The project first, foremost and always is a water supply project."

Mead stated that it appears Million shifted federal agencies "to short-circuit the regulatory process and/or sidestep fundamental issues."

Million said Friday he addressed his current permit application to FERC because the project would generate electricity.

"This wasn't meant to circumvent anything," Million said. "This was required by regulation that FERC become the federal lead agency on a hydropower electric project."

Million said his project is similar to the proposed Lake Powell Pipeline Project, for which FERC is also the permitting agency. That project involves a proposed \$1 billion pipeline that would carry 100,000 acre-feet of water a year to southern Utah, generating electricity as the water flows downhill in places.

Mead stated that Million has not shown how much water Colorado is still entitled to under the Colorado River Compact. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which operates Flaming Gorge Reservoir, is working on a study of how much water, if any, it believes could be available for withdrawal there.

Million said he's confident there's sufficient water to supply his project. He has said that if Colorado and Wyoming don't use all the water they're entitled to in the Colorado River system, it will flow to California and other lower basin states.

"There is a huge demand/supply shortfall of water in Colorado," Million said, adding that there are also significant supply issues in southeastern Wyoming. "If Wyoming doesn't want to develop its compact allocation, we fully respect that."

Mead wrote that Wyoming has been involved in efforts to recover endangered fish species on the Upper Colorado River for decades. He said the agency's review must consider the likely effect on the fish both of the pipeline project as well as Wyoming's possible future use of its share of water from the Green River. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department filed a separate request with FERC to intervene in the permit application to track the issue.

A coalition of environmental groups this week announced that it's seeking to intervene in FERC's review. The groups, including the Sierra Club, Earthjustice and Utah Rivers Council, said the pipeline plan would hurt endangered fish and deplete water resources. Local governments in southwestern Wyoming have also moved to intervene.

Million said he agrees federal regulators need to consider water supply issues as well as his project's likely effect on wildlife and recreation.