

Springs could benefit from Southern Delivery System lake

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[R. SCOTT RAPPOLD](#)

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A plan to drown 760 acres of prairie southeast of Colorado Springs with Arkansas River water, part of the Southern Delivery System pipeline, could give the city its first large boating reservoir close to home.

Upper Williams Creek Reservoir will be the largest, in surface area, owned by Colorado Springs. Boaters, anglers, swimmers, hikers and picnickers may all be able to use it, in a region that has always been challenged for aquatic recreation.

But don't go buy a speed boat and water skis yet. It will be at least a decade before the reservoir is full, and Colorado Springs Utilities officials have not determined how recreation will be managed, since there are concerns about the impacts motor boating could have on a lake whose primary function is to store drinking water.

"We do want to offer some form of boating, but we've got to have some internal discussion and agreement on what kind of boating that is," said Keith Riley, SDS project planning and permitting manager.

Utilities has received the two major approvals, from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and Pueblo County, needed to build the \$1.1 billion pipeline from Pueblo Reservoir to the new reservoir near Drennan Road.

Motor boaters in Colorado Springs now travel to Pueblo Reservoir or Denver, or deal with limited hours and the small size of Prospect Lake in Memorial Park, or frigid mountain water and limited days at Rampart Reservoir. Other Colorado Springs reservoirs, including those on the north slope of Pikes Peak, don't allow gas-powered motors.

Upper Williams Creek Reservoir will be one-seventh the size of Pueblo Reservoir, one-fourth the size of Elevenmile Reservoir, 120 acres smaller than Cherry Creek Reservoir outside of Denver and more than 10 times the size of Prospect Lake in Memorial Park.

Al West, owner of Al West Boat Service, recently got out of the boat-selling business, after 30 years of trying to compete with the large dealerships in Pueblo and Denver. He focuses on service these days.

"I think it would definitely, if it turns out to be of any size at all, it would be very disappointing if they didn't let power boats on it," West said this week, asked about the new reservoir.

But some research has linked gas-powered boats to water-quality problems, including petroleum in the water. Recreational boats also provide the main transportation for invasive

zebra mussels, which were found at Pueblo Reservoir last year - and last month hitch-hiking on three boats before they were put in the reservoir. The mussels, which had before not been detected in Colorado, can clog water pipes and drive out native species in a lake.

Utilities officials also haven't decided if they will allow swimming, which can lead to problems of dirt and human waste in water.

"We do want to maximize the recreational opportunities at the reservoir site, but we've got to balance that with safety and protection of the water supply," Riley said.

Fishing will be allowed. As a shallow lake, about 120 feet at its deepest, it will be a warm-water fishery, to be stocked by the Colorado Division of Wildlife, Riley said, probably with bass, walleye, perch and blue gill.

There are also plans for picnic facilities, hiking trails and a playground.

An artist's rendering by Utilities shows sail boats, a boat with a small outboard motor and people playing volleyball and picnicking, but nobody water-skiing or swimming.

After Utilities officials determine the limits of recreation, they will solicit public comment on a master plan and eventually hand management of recreation over to city parks officials. Riley expects there will be an entrance fee for visitors, probably close to the \$6 fee charged at Pueblo and Elevenmile reservoirs.

Much of the land for the reservoir is owned by the state and Bob Norris, owner of T-Cross Ranches. Utilities said there are nine residential properties, including five homes that will be bought by Utilities.

If the city stays on its current timetable of having the pipeline operational by 2012, the reservoir will be full by 2018, Riley said.

The other reservoir planned for SDS, the Williams Creek Reservoir, to the south, will not be open to swimming or boating, because its levels are expected to be lowest in spring and summer, when these activities are at their most popular, Riley said. Fishing will be allowed.