

## **Jimmy Camp Creek plan shifts**

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**R. SCOTT RAPPOLD  
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Colorado Springs Utilities and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation have scrapped a plan for the proposed Jimmy Camp Creek Reservoir east of Colorado Springs in favor of a less-controversial man-made lake six miles south as part of the Southern Delivery System water pipeline.

Despite years of planning and spending \$6.4 million to buy land for the Jimmy Camp Creek Reservoir, Utilities agreed with a report issued Friday by the Bureau of Reclamation that proposes creating the Upper Williams Creek Reservoir near Drennan Road.

The 187-page report was an update of the environmental impact statement for the \$1 billion pipeline that is expected to bring water from Pueblo Reservoir to meet Colorado Springs' growing demand.

It's the latest step in the slow, methodical process of getting federal approval and one of several hurdles needed before construction begins. Commissioners in Pueblo County, where there has been opposition to the project, must still approve the pipeline.

Friday's changes are intended to address some environmental concerns over the project. The original plan was to pump water from Pueblo to the Jimmy Camp Creek site for storage. Water would be treated, pumped into the public water supply and then flow back to the Arkansas River via Fountain Creek.

Utilities officials were sure enough about the reservoir location to buy 400 acres from 14 landowners until this spring, when buying was halted because of uncertainty over the site. During a public comment period earlier this year, fossil experts worried about the preservation of prehistoric relics, residents below the reservoir worried about the dam breaking and others were concerned about the reservoir's impacts on wetlands and the potential for waterfowl to interfere with nearby Colorado Springs Airport.

Excavating and moving the fossils and relics would have cost as much as \$10 million, Utilities officials said.

"By moving over to Upper Williams Creek, we address a number of issues," said Keith Riley, Utilities' project planning and permitting manager.

"This report that everyone has now is a direct result of the feedback we've been getting from the general public, from agencies, etc.," said Bureau of Reclamation spokeswoman Kara Lamb.

Upper Williams Creek Reservoir would hold the same water volume as Jimmy Camp Creek Reservoir, 30,500 acre-feet, and it is 300 acres larger. Return flows - treated effluent - would be pumped into Williams Creek Reservoir to the south, part of the original plan.

The cost of SDS with the new reservoir would be \$19 million more, though that would be offset by \$12 million less in maintenance and operating costs, according to the updated environmental impact statement.

The land for Upper Williams Creek Reservoir is uninhabited prairie, a mix of state-owned and private land, Riley said. Unlike the Jimmy Camp Creek site, no residents would be displaced.

Officials have not decided whether Jimmy Camp Creek-area residents, some of whom remain in their homes paying rent to Utilities, will be given the option to buy back their property, or if the land will be sold, said CSU spokesman Steve Berry. The agency plans to hold onto the land until the approval process is complete.

The owners of Banning Lewis Ranch, the sprawling development that contains 1,500 acres Utilities was eyeing for the reservoir, applauded the change in reservoir plans.

"We think it's the right decision," said John Cassiani, vice president of property operations. "We think the land that Colorado Springs Utilities was looking at on our property to take or buy from us for the reservoir site was our most valuable property."

The Colorado Springs Trails, Open Space and Parks program has also been following plans for the reservoir in hopes of creating a regional network of parks including the lake and possibly Corral Bluffs, a nearby canyon area under consideration for purchase.

While that plan is off, for now, the TOPS working committee could still look at an open space in the area, which pre-dates talk of the reservoir, said committee chairman Scot Hume.

"The vision will change back to where it was and hopefully there's a potential to make a connecting regional park that goes all the way to Corral Bluffs," Hume said.

Utilities officials said they don't expect the change in reservoirs to impact the timeline of the Southern Delivery System, expected to deliver water by 2012. The Bureau of Reclamation expects to release a final environmental impact statement by the end of the year, incorporating any changes, followed by a record of decision, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act.

Along with the reservoir change, several other modifications to the SDS plan were included in the Bureau of Reclamation's report:

- Adding a pump station for untreated water at the Upper Williams Creek Reservoir site.
- Moving the water treatment plant at Upper Williams Creek Reservoir northwest to near the intersection of U.S. Highway 24 and Colorado Highway 94.
- Building a pipeline from the lower Williams Creek Reservoir to Fountain Creek, instead of using the channel of Williams Creek, to minimize erosion and impacts to aquatic life.

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CONTACT THE WRITER: 476-1605 or [srappold@gazette.com](mailto:srappold@gazette.com)