

Fountain Creek flows a moving target

With stormwater enterprise dead, an adaptive management program is the primary tool for compliance.

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Fountain Creek flows would be a moving target for Colorado Springs and its partners in the Southern Delivery System, according to information in an application to a Fountain Creek improvement district.

The application was presented to the Fountain Creek Watershed Flood Control and Greenway District last month, along with promises from Colorado Springs Utilities officials that stormwater would be controlled despite the demise of the city's stormwater enterprise.

In addition to paying the district \$50 million and spending \$75 million to fortify wastewater structures if SDS is built - conditions imposed by Pueblo County in its 1041 permit - Colorado Springs would be required to use an adaptive management program to monitor and evaluate changes on Fountain Creek over time.

The program would be part of its federal contract with the Bureau of Reclamation. Colorado Springs has requested contract negotiations on behalf of its partners in Security, Fountain and Pueblo West, but no timetable has been set. No one can be certain of exactly what the program would require until SDS is built, however. "The (program) will allow changes to be tracked over time, judging whether these changes are likely caused by operation of the SDS project and addressing actual effects in a systematic manner," the application states. "The combination of these two projectwide commitments ensures that there are data available to make informed decisions on the impacts of the SDS project, and that there is money available to address impacts to Fountain Creek different than those anticipated."

In an interview this week, the district's interim Director Gary Barber called the federal requirement a more powerful motivator to improve Fountain Creek than the defunct stormwater district.

"The federal (National Environmental Policy Act) process puts Colorado Springs in a position to provide explicit information about the flow regime to Fountain Creek," Barber said.

Colorado Springs agrees, according to the application.

"These data will allow a better understanding of water quality issues in the Fountain Creek Watershed and will be used to modify mitigations to address unanticipated impacts, if necessary," the application states.

While the stormwater enterprise was generating \$15 million yearly toward dealing with federal compliance, planning and addressing more than \$300 million in project backlog. Colorado Springs will have to find more money from other funds when future modifications are needed, if some other sort of stormwater funding is not put in place.

Barber said the federal leverage, which could come either through Reclamation or the Army Corps of Engineers, is a greater incentive than “stormwater police.”

Other participants in the project - right now Security and Fountain, but additional El Paso County users could be added - must comply with stormwater discharge permits, the application states.

The application also sheds some light on how flows in Fountain Creek would be impacted.

Because of two new reservoirs on Williams Creek, a tributary that joins Fountain Creek south of Fountain, the impact of 10-year floods would be slightly reduced to 15,000 cubic feet per second from 16,000 cfs.

The average annual flow of Fountain Creek would increase to 273 cfs from 196 cfs, however. There would also be a 7-foot-diameter pipeline from the exchange reservoir in Williams Creek capable of delivering 300 cfs - or 194 million gallons per day - to Fountain Creek.

Colorado Springs plans to construct an “energy dissipation structure” below the outfall of the pipeline to reduce sedimentation.

The city has committed to dredging the channel of Fountain Creek through Pueblo to restore levees to 100-year flood capacity. It will also restore 4 miles of creek and wetlands at its Clear Springs Ranch south of Fountain and 3 miles near the Sand Creek confluence.

SDS plans call for a 43-mile, 66-inch diameter pipeline from Pueblo Dam, 9 miles of other water delivery pipelines, two reservoirs on Williams Creek, the 5-mile return pipeline from Williams Creek, three pump stations and a water treatment plant east of Colorado Springs.

The Fountain Creek district has direct authority over structures in the flood plain between Fountain and Pueblo. The main pipeline crosses Fountain Creek about five miles north of the Pueblo County line. The exchange reservoir outfall is also in the Fountain Creek floodplain.

The district also makes land-use regulations to other agencies, including El Paso County, which is now conducting its own evaluation of SDS.