

## **PUBLISHER'S WAR WITH THE SPRINGS**

**Rawlings forgoes Pueblo's best interest**

**March 28, 2008**

### ***The Gazette: Our View***

Pueblo Chieftain publisher Robert Rawlings seems to despise Colorado Springs. To spite our city, he appears willing to forgo the best interests of his own.

Colorado Springs owns Arkansas River water that's needed for anticipated prosperity and growth. Colorado Springs Utilities plans to build the Southern Delivery System, a \$1.1 billion distribution project that would pump water from Pueblo Reservoir through a 66-inch-diameter pipeline. It would distribute water to Pueblo West, Fountain, Security and Colorado Springs - water each community rightfully owns and needs in order to flourish.

Pueblo Reservoir was built by the federal government and is paid for by communities that use it to store water. As the largest town in the region, Colorado Springs pays for 70 percent of the reservoir's debt.

Coloradans know Pueblo as an extraordinary city, and most Springs residents feel fortunate to have the friendly, historic and culturally rich community as a nearby neighbor. We love the restaurants, the storybook downtown, the river and the state fair. So it wasn't surprising that city officials in Colorado Springs and Pueblo were able to reach an agreement in 2004 to maintain minimum stream flows through Pueblo, downstream from the reservoir. The river walk serves as an asset enjoyed by all in southern Colorado. To maintain minimum flows, reservoir users can take larger amounts of water when the reservoir is full, and lower amounts when storage is low. That's what reservoirs do: they enable humans to manage rivers.

In appreciation of the minimum flow agreement, Pueblo city officials gave their support to plans for a Southern Delivery System that would pump water directly from the reservoir - as opposed to retrieving the water upstream or downstream from the dam.

The reservoir was built, in part, to store the water owned by communities in the Pikes Peak region. It only makes sense for Colorado Spring Utilities to obtain its water from the place where it's stored. Because of the minimum flow agreement, it's a win-win proposal: Colorado Springs takes clean water and builds the most affordable delivery system engineers can devise; Pueblo enjoys a steady, dependable river all year long.

But Rawlings doesn't want everyone to win. Instead, he wants Colorado Springs to lose. Perhaps he's of the mindset that what's good for the Springs is bad for Pueblo. Or that Pueblo can't win if the Springs doesn't lose - a classic poverty mentality.

On March 23, the day his newspaper kicked off another series about the big, bad pipeline plan, Rawlings published an editorial that said the Springs should tap its water downstream from Pueblo at the confluence of Fountain Creek and the river.

It's a bad idea, for Colorado Springs and Pueblo. For the Springs it means collecting river water immediately downstream from a city. Along with the sediment that's suspended in moving water, it will contain fresh pollution. In Pueblo - like any river city - urban runoff ends up in the river. Colorado Springs would inherit the oil from every leaking gasket, the fertilizer runoff from lawns, and the deep-fry sludge Uncle Fred dumps down the storm drain. Utilities officials estimate the additional cleaning and maintenance involved with downstream collection would cost hundreds of millions of dollars over the next 50 years.

To get his way, Rawlings has urged Pueblo County commissioners and city leaders to cause regulatory trouble for the Southern Delivery System.

"We urge local leaders, including Pueblo City Council, to make sure negotiations over the Southern Delivery System result in a favorable outcome for Pueblo and the Arkansas River basin," Rawlings wrote.

The best outcome involves Springs Utilities tapping water from the logical source: Pueblo Reservoir, a storage facility paid for mostly by Colorado Springs. It's unquestionably in Pueblo's best interest. Why? Because Utilities officials favor taking water from farther upstream, in Fremont County, if they can't tap the reservoir.

That would be terrible for Pueblo. The pipeline would miss Pueblo West, which needs it. Worse, it would reduce the amount of water flowing toward Pueblo, and Springs Utilities would no longer be legally bound by the minimum flow agreement. Legally and logically, the flow agreement goes with a reservoir tap. That's because dams and reservoirs serve as control valves for rivers. They are designed for the storage, retrieval and management of water - to simultaneously facilitate pipelines, urban river walks, and other human water needs.

Colorado Springs loves Pueblo - the Arkansas Valley's crown jewel. Few Springs residents would tolerate a pipeline plan that discounted Pueblo's best interests. To spite Pueblo is to harm Colorado Springs.

Yet spite seems the only possible motive for the hostility Rawlings has shown for a logical pipeline plan - one that takes water from storage and maintains the beauty of our neighboring town.