



Greater chance SDS runs through county

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Chances are “significant” the final choice for the massive Southern Delivery System water project will run through Fremont County.

On Tuesday, the Fremont County Commissioners entered into a contract of cooperation with Colorado Springs Utilities. The six-page Intergovernmental Agreement provides for a \$50,000 initial deposit to the county to pay for permit applications, expert reviews, consultants and other costs associated with the project.

County attorney Brenda Jackson said the IGA is an understanding for the entities to cooperate throughout the application process.

“The City of Colorado Springs intends to apply for various permits associated with the project,” Jackson said. “They want to get permits in place, should they decide Fremont County is the place.”

Jackson said the county would be fully reimbursed for all staff time and expertise used on the project. Terms of the agreement indicate the \$50,000 deposit will be replenished as necessary, or any unused balance will be returned.

SDS project manager John Fredell agreed the IGA was essential for the \$1.1 billion project. “It’s important to sign an IGA like this so both sides know up front that we’re going to have an orderly process to work through on permitting,” Fredell said by phone Tuesday afternoon. “We think this is the best way to do business. Both entities know what they’re going to get out of the process.”

The draft Environmental Impact Statement, released by the Bureau of Reclamation at the end of February, said all seven SDS alternatives were reasonable proposals.

“That was a big deal,” Fredell said. “It says at this point, they believe none of them have unreasonable environmental impacts.

“As we move forward, we’ll determine which way we want to go. I think there is some significant probability that we could come through Fremont County. We want to be ready in terms of permitting.”

SDS would provide water to users in Colorado Springs, Fountain, Security and Pueblo through the year 2046, taking advantage of water rights the utility already owns. Untreated water would be pulled from the Arkansas River as it runs through Fremont County, near Colo. 115 east of Florence, in two of the identified project alternatives.

“We think it’s very important to keep options open to have flexibility,” Fredell said. “We’ve looked at the Fremont County alternative. It’s buildable, reasonable, and we can come up with a good project with that alternative.”

In the current project schedule, Reclamation will finalize its EIS by the end of the year and issue a final Decision of Record in January 2009. Fredell said the project should break ground by summer of 2009.

“Obviously, things could change,” Fredell said.

Regardless of the timeline, SDS managers want to be ready to move forward as soon as possible.

“We want to have moved through those steps so that would not hold us up after other issues are done,” Fredell said of the permitting process.

Public input on the draft EIS will be accepted by the Bureau of Reclamation through April 29. Reclamation will host an informational meeting from 6 to 9 p.m. Thursday at the Quality Inn, 3075 E. U.S. 50. Information stations will be manned by various experts to explain the project and its potential impacts.

Fredell said a court reporter will be on site to accept comments from residents. The public is encouraged to attend the session.

“This is their opportunity to be involved and comment on the process,” said Fredell, who will attend the meeting. “We really want to ensure people come out and talk.”

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