

The SDS environmental impact statement

CSBJ staff | June 13, 2008

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Today is the last day for the public to submit comments regarding the draft environmental impact statement for the Southern Delivery System (SDS) to the Bureau of Reclamation. The following comments were submitted to the bureau by this newspaper.

In evaluating the draft EIS, we find a great deal of salient information about the various alternatives available to Colorado Springs and its partners for developing the water rights that they own on the Arkansas River, and for supplying the cities with the water necessary to support regional population growth through the middle of this century.

Two facts seem inescapable.

First, the population of El Paso County, as predicted by the state demographer, is forecast to grow from 605,000 during 2010 to 935,000 by 2035 — an increase of more than 50 percent. It's clear that even with accelerated residential water conservation, as well as more efficient use of water by businesses, Colorado Springs and its partners will require additional water.

Secondly, it's clear that the best, fairest and most environmentally sensitive way of providing additional water is through the construction of the so-called "preferred option," a pipeline to be constructed by Colorado Springs Utilities from Pueblo Reservoir to Colorado Springs.

Some say that Colorado Springs could augment its existing water resources by combining conservation, recycling and expanded use of groundwater resources. We believe that these alternatives would be more expensive and, at least with present technology, furnish less water with greater environmental impact.

It also has been suggested that Colorado Springs and its partners might participate in Aaron Million's proposed pipeline from Wyoming's Flaming Gorge reservoir to the Front Range. While theoretically attractive, Million's project relies upon Colorado's undeveloped rights upon the Colorado River under the 1922 Compact which divided the river's flow among seven Western states. Climatologists predict that the river's flows will continue to diminish as a result of regional climate change, meaning that there may be no more water for Colorado to develop.

Colorado Springs cannot trade real water in the Arkansas for phantom water in Flaming Gorge. Opposition to the project has been focused on its impact upon Fountain Creek and users below the confluence of the creek and the Arkansas River.

No one can deny that flows on the Fountain have increased substantially during past decades. These increased flows are partly a consequence of urbanization in El Paso County and clearly need to be addressed by project participants.

But just as CSU and its partners do not bear total responsibility for the many problems of

Fountain Creek and the lower Arkansas, they cannot be asked to assume all the costs of mitigation. Such efforts must be jointly undertaken by a regional partnership — one which includes not only local governments, but the state and the federal governments.

We would also note that Colorado Springs has invested tens of millions of dollars during recent years to control both stormwater and untreated wastewater releases into Fountain Creek. These will continue for many decades.

To prevent Colorado Springs from responsibly and appropriately developing the rights that the city holds on the Arkansas would have severe and permanent consequences. It would lead to regional economic stagnation and the migration of businesses and individuals from the area. This would affect the entire state.

We recognize how precious water is in the arid West and we understand that Colorado Springs and its partners need to husband water resources. This city is already a leader in conservation, and that leadership will continue.

We urge the Bureau of Reclamation to carefully consider these, and all other submitted comments. We trust that the final EIS will continue to support the construction of the preferred alternative and allow CSU to continue the process which will, we hope, lead to the successful completion of the Southern Delivery System.