



## **Springs Utilities goes with Pueblo for SDS**

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Colorado Springs Utilities chose Wednesday to move forward with its preferred alternative and construct the Southern Delivery System in Pueblo County, drawing water from the Pueblo Reservoir for its customers and partners.

A "Highway 115 Alternative" had been considered as CSU's second most viable option. Fremont County signed an intergovernmental agreement with the agency last year and received a deposit of \$50,000 to cover the county's costs during the permit process. The project could have meant an economic boon to the county.

On Thursday, John Fredell, SDS project manager, said the county still was a fall-back alternative but, even more important, a new ally for Colorado Springs Utilities.

"There are still a number of issues we've got to deal with," Fredell said, including obtaining dozens of permits and licenses. "Until we have dirt turned and pipe going in the ground, we definitely want to maintain that opportunity" to keep Fremont County as a possible option.

"The board's decision is consistent with what we've said all along, that the preferred route is preferred for a number of reasons," Fredell said. In a side-by-side comparison of nine items, the Pueblo County route was preferred in seven instances, while the other two were equal to both alternatives.

Highway 115 implementation costs were expected to be well over \$1 billion, while the Pueblo Reservoir option should save CSU almost \$200 million. The reservoir pipeline route also will be shorter than the highway alternative.

Fremont County District 1 Commissioner Mike Stiehl, who studies water issues in Colorado, was reached Thursday morning at a water workshop in Crested Butte. He said the decision was not a surprise.

"I still think there are a bunch of positive things that have come from this," Stiehl said, "no matter how it turns out. The benefits to our economy were primarily potential employment, but that is still there no matter where they come out. Pueblo is pretty darned close, and people can commute."

Stiehl said Fremont County already has accounted for about \$15,000 of the \$50,000 deposit from CSU, not including commissioners' time spent on the project. Unused funds will be returned to the utility.

"We have accounted for time, effort, paper, telephones and staff time down to one-tenth of an hour," Stiehl said.

Both Stiehl and Fredell said CSU had forged strong relationships with Beaver Park Water and the Penrose Water District. Both agencies worked with the utility company to create agreements to partner to obtain or move water through the SDS pipeline, if it was built in Fremont County.

Fredell said those collaborations will continue to some extent.

“They had to expand some resources to review engineering and determine how the project might affect them,” Fredell said. “We’ve agreed to reimburse them for some of the engineering work they have done, and there are other provisions in the agreement on information sharing.”

“Both of those entities, I think, are pleased with what they have gotten from CSU,” Stiehl said. “Both feel they will still benefit.”

Fredell said CSU also would not just walk away from the improvements it had planned at Florence River Park.

“There are things we would like to do, like a volunteer effort maybe this fall. We could set up a day or a series of days to bring volunteers from our organization and maybe some equipment to make some progress at the park,” Fredell said. “Our organization has really been involved in community-type volunteer activities, and our employees put in thousands of hours each year doing volunteer work. We’re thinking of what we can do to help that park along.”

He also said surveying and other information from the suggested park improvements would be made available to Florence, so the city can benefit from all the work that was done.

Fredell applauded the working relationship between Fremont County and SDS as a “model” affiliation.

“They’ve been fantastic,” Fredell said. “They didn’t make it easy and give us a free pass; they were very straightforward, very professional. They worked things through very well, and they were easy to deal with in terms of making their time available to us. We were treated very well.”

The CSU board approved implementing the project with a 2016 in-service date. Construction of the Pueblo Dam connection should begin in 2010, with pipeline work beginning in 2011. CSU water users will pay for the project, most likely through a phased-in rate increase.

Additional information on the SDS project is available at [www.sdswater.org](http://www.sdswater.org).