

## **Fountain Creek authority appears closer**

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**A committee is looking at forming a body to support upgrades as soon as next year.**

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The committee is talking about a new intergovernmental agreement between El Paso and Pueblo counties to develop the structure of the authority. Barber suggested the authority would primarily be responsible for improvements along the Fountain Creek corridor, and to a lesser degree within tributaries - almost all of which are in El Paso County.

A subcommittee made up of Barber, El Paso County Commissioner Sallie Clark, Pueblo County Commissioner Jeff Chostner and Sal Pace, the unopposed Democratic candidate for House District 46, will meet on the makeup of the authority board prior to the Sept. 5 meeting.

Early on at Friday's meeting, Pace was critical of the committee for not working more closely with lawmakers who would later be asked to sponsor and support legislation. Also in attendance was Ed Vigil, Democratic candidate for House District 62, which represents Pueblo's East Side.

"The folks south of the (county line) have the most at stake; have the most to risk," Pace said. "It's important to me to have balance."

Ross Vincent, who represents the Sierra Club, questioned the heavily weighted role of government in the proposal.

Vincent is concerned because Colorado Springs, Pueblo, Fountain and several sanitation districts on Fountain Creek fought a Colorado Water Quality Control Division proposal for tougher water quality standards on Fountain Creek in July.

"They were saying Fountain Creek is hopelessly polluted," Vincent said. "A lot of people were angry."

Vincent convinced the local chapter of the Sierra Club to continue working with the task force, saying the cities in the group should have brought up the issue in water quality committee meetings of the task force. Vincent, who wrote a letter in protest of the change of designation, only learned the issue would be before the Water Quality Control Commission about a week before a hearing.

The commission sided with the Water Quality Control Division in making Fountain Creek a reviewable stream.

"I'm more concerned about what we do now than what happened in the past, but we have to work to restore credibility," Vincent said.

The committee again wrestled with the question of setting up an authority for Fountain Creek which would create a tax over two entire counties, even though the 932-square-mile Fountain Creek watershed covers only part of each county.

The committee has, in the past, agreed there are benefits to improving Fountain Creek that benefit the vast majority of people in both counties, such as creating a recreational amenity, preventing bridges from washing out and improving water quality.

Clark added that the tax base of a strictly drawn river corridor district would not generate enough money to fund any meaningful project.

“There’s not a good answer either way, but a number of people feel the best way to do it is countywide,” Chostner said. “Everyone in the county benefits.”

Dennis Maroney, stormwater director for Pueblo’s Stormwater Utility, said the authority should also look at the Arkansas River downstream of the Fountain Creek confluence. In Pueblo County, sedimentation in that reach of river has already created issues for Avondale’s water supply and represents an obstacle for Pueblo’s sewer treatment outfall.

“You look at that section of river and it’s choked with sediment,” Maroney said.

Others on the committee said the focus has to be on Fountain Creek.

“You take care of Fountain and the other problems go away,” said Jay Winner, general manager of the Lower Arkansas Valley Water Conservancy District, which is working on a Fountain Creek Master Plan with Colorado Springs and a water quality study with Colorado State University-Pueblo.