

SDS DEIS Issues Paper

SDS Impacts on Agricultural Economics in the Lower Arkansas Valley

The Arkansas River Valley has a vast supply of farmland and the economies of many towns and cities in this area rely on agriculture. In the Lower Arkansas River Valley (i.e., Crowley, Otero and Bent counties), agriculture employs 14 percent of the population compared to 2 percent statewide. In this area, farmlands produce about \$240 million in agricultural products annually. While the other areas impacted by a Southern Delivery System (SDS) do not rely upon agriculture as much as the Lower Arkansas Valley, there are still substantial farmlands in both Pueblo County and the Upper Arkansas River Valley.

Four of the seven Alternatives (1, 2, 6 and 7) studied in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the SDS would discharge treated wastewater into Fountain Creek that would ultimately flow into the Arkansas River in the Lower Arkansas Valley. Farmers there depend on Arkansas River water for their irrigation needs, making water quality and quantity vitally important. The DEIS focuses on crop yield changes due to salinity levels (i.e., how much naturally occurring dissolved salt is in the water) and water availability for irrigation.

The DEIS evaluated existing conditions in the Lower Arkansas Valley and those anticipated under a number of Alternatives. All the Alternatives are compared to the No Action Alternative, which is used as the “baseline.” The No Action Alternative is compared to Existing Conditions or the current conditions that exist in the environment.

Key DEIS Finding: There would be no effect on the quantity of water available for irrigation under any of the Action Alternatives. There would be a slight increase in salinity for each of the Alternatives considered below, affecting crop yields by less than 1 percent with an overall economic impact of less than \$500,000 per year.

Existing Conditions

- Grains, hay and vegetables are the major crops grown in the Lower Arkansas Valley.
- Nine major feedlots are located in the Valley, ranging from 3,000 head to about 35,000 head of cattle.
- There are about 76,000 acres of irrigated lands in the area.
- Water supplies in the Lower Arkansas Valley already have relatively high levels of salinity, causing more than \$5.2 million in adverse economic effects to the regional economy each year.

No Action Alternative (Alternative 1), Proposed Action (Alternative 2) and Highway 115 Alternative (Alternative 7)

- There would be a slight increase in salinity during the irrigation season, affecting crop yields by less than 1 percent over Existing Conditions with an overall economic impact of less than \$500,000 per year.
- There would be no effect on the quantity of water available for irrigation.