

Stormwater pledges given to district

Colorado Springs Utilities says its commitments are in place, despite the vote on Issue 300.

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FOUNTAIN - Colorado Springs officials gave strong assurances Friday that stormwater commitments made while obtaining permission to build the Southern Delivery System would be honored.

“Regarding our commitments on stormwater, there are legitimate concerns,” said Bruce McCormick, chief of water services for Colorado Springs Utilities. “It’s important to us and will continue to be important.”

Pueblo County Commissioner Jeff Chostner asked McCormick to explain the stormwater commitments to the Fountain Creek Watershed Flood Control and Greenway District board in light of last month’s vote on Doug Bruce’s Issue 300 and Colorado Springs City Council’s subsequent decision to phase out its stormwater enterprise over the next two years.

McCormick said Colorado Springs’ commitments on stormwater do not depend on the enterprise. Those commitments are contained within both the conditions of Pueblo County’s 1041 permit and the Bureau of Reclamation’s environmental impact statement. “We clearly have a stormwater commitment to SDS and we will maintain that,” McCormick said. “The EIS requires us to annually evaluate flows in Fountain Creek. If they exceed historic flows, we have to sit down with Reclamation to address that.”

At the same time, there are other benefits to Fountain Creek from SDS, he said. Those include \$50 million that will be paid directly to the district after SDS is complete in 2016 and \$75 million in continued improvements to the wastewater system, including stream crossing susceptible to flooding.

McCormick said dredging the channel in Pueblo and wetlands enhancement projects are planned for 2010.

“Fountain Creek is better off with SDS than without it,” McCormick said.

“It’s important that we know it’s not in jeopardy,” Chostner said. “It sounds like this relates more to internal financing.”

“We were concerned that a lot of things were going to go negative because of Issue 300,” added Pueblo Councilman Larry Atencio.

Colorado Springs Councilman Larry Small explained that the stormwater enterprise was always intended as a way to meet federal requirements and manage stormwater.

“There is an idea that we will replace it with a regional stormwater district,” Small said. “There are still more issues, including possible court involvement.”

When it was formed in 2005, the enterprise would meet those requirements. It also would begin to address a backlog \$300 million in projects, about \$66 million critical to Fountain Creek.

Only a portion of those projects have been addressed.

It also would have updated planning documents for tributary basins, some of which are operating on 30-year-old plans. New drainage basin planning studies for Jimmy Camp Creek, Sand Creek and Cottonwood Creek - areas that have experienced rapid growth - are being developed, said Ken Sampley, Colorado Springs stormwater director.

“It doesn’t appear we’ll be able to finish up all of the proposed reissues,” Sampley said. “The regulations for new development are in place, but we were looking at the updates for the other basins as well.”

The city is continuing to work on a revised development code, which could serve as a model for the entire Fountain Creek watershed, Sampley said.

SDS, a \$1 billion-plus pipeline project from Pueblo Dam to serve Colorado Springs, Security, Fountain and Pueblo West, must obtain approval from the district because it involves construction in the floodplain between Fountain and Pueblo. The district also will provide advice to El Paso County, which is considering SDS permits.

“It is helpful to understand what this means to Fountain Creek,” said Richard Skorman, a Colorado Springs businessman who represents the citizens advisory group on the board. “We need to look at the phaseout and what it means to our future plans. I think there’s a role for this group to advocate for (a stormwater district).”