

## **Fountain needs a few bends to get in shape**

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**Colorado Springs and the Lower Arkansas Valley district share plans with Pueblo City Council for improving the creek.**

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Fixing Fountain Creek doesn't necessarily mean straightening it out.

In fact, by adding a few bends here and there, some marshy areas and a string of detention ponds, it would be less prone to minor flooding, say those who are crafting an improvement plan for the creek.

"A lot of the things we're showing are not hard and fast," Carol Baker of Colorado Springs Utilities told Pueblo City Council on Monday. "Our goal is to educate the landowners in the best methods to prevent erosion. We want to give the landowners a place to look for help and the funds to do it."

Baker and Jay Winner, general manager of the Lower Arkansas Valley Water Conservancy District, presented a progress report on a Fountain Creek Master Plan to council. The plan is 10 months into a two-year, \$600,000 program to improve Fountain Creek.

The same presentation will be given to Colorado Springs City Council on Aug. 20. The master plan has identified two projects - an interpretive center at Pinon and an eco-recreation complex south of Colorado Springs - as well as a plan to improve the troublesome areas of Fountain Creek by mimicking the healthy areas.

The effort has led to the formation of the Fountain Foundation, a nonprofit group that already has obtained a \$1 million donation of land for the Pinon interpretive center.

"People are starting to line up to help on Fountain Creek," Winner said.

The idea of the master plan is to have projects waiting if and when funding becomes available through an authority being contemplated by the Fountain Vision Task Force, Winner said.

The group is working within guidelines being adopted through an Army Corps of Engineers study on Fountain Creek, Baker added. That study offers two major points worth pursuing, she said: The need to improve the effectiveness of the Fountain Creek levee system through Pueblo and the value of a coordinated approach to fixing problems on the Fountain.

There are two choices to fixing the levees, Baker said. One is to dredge the sediment from the channel which reduces the effectiveness of the levees. The other is to straighten the channel to speed flows to the Arkansas River.

Overall, the goal is not to straighten Fountain Creek, but to add sinuosity, sweeping curves that remove cutting energy from the water, especially in areas where the stream is cutting at the bank, Baker said.

In the process, wetlands and side detention would be created, she said.

Councilman Ray Aguilera asked how much the identified projects would cost and whether any dam sites would be identified in the master plan.

Councilman Larry Atencio asked what portion of the creek needs channel repairs.

Councilwoman Vera Ortegon wanted to know about the prospects for a dam or series of dams.

“For our peace of mind, we need to look at more than just the levees,” Ortegon said.

Baker said the costs of the two demonstration projects would be \$25 million and about half the creek would need some work to reduce erosion. The master plan is leaning toward “nature’s rip-rap” - trees or plants rather than rock - to guide channel flows.

Neither the Colorado Springs-Lower Ark study nor the Corps study is looking at a large dam on Fountain Creek, Baker said.

The Corps ruled out a large dam at one identified site, just north of Colorado 47, in its Fountain Creek Watershed Plan as too expensive for the benefits it would provide.

Side detention ponds, with dikes smaller than dams, are envisioned up and down Fountain Creek, however, and have the potential to handle large flows over several hours. The ponds would not hold up to a 100- or 500-year flood, she said.

The study does not exclude other efforts to study a dam, as envisioned in legislation now pending in Congress.

“In no way are we ruling out a dam on the Fountain,” Winner said. “We’re putting a plan in place. We’ve got to have someplace to start from.”