

Water project a boost to area's construction

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Guest Columnist

The Southern Delivery System (SDS) is critically important to Colorado Springs because our very future depends on it. With it we will maintain our quality of life and a healthy economy.

It's also a very large construction project that will provide hundreds of millions of dollars in construction contracts, jobs and procurement of goods and services for the counties in which it is located, including El Paso County.

We have positive momentum for the project. The Bureau of Reclamation will issue the Final Environmental Impact Statement soon and both Pueblo and Fremont counties are considering approval of our required land use permits. These critical milestones will pave the way for us to begin construction.

Without SDS, we will eventually run short of water, resulting in severe and potentially permanent water restrictions that would make it impossible to maintain our quality of life and economy.

We have both a legal and a moral obligation to provide the water required to meet our communities' needs. SDS is the most cost-effective and environmentally responsible way to do that.

The additional water storage provided by SDS will help protect us against drought, a growing concern in the American Southwest, including Colorado. And, the new reservoir to be built near Colorado Springs will provide unique water recreation opportunities for the entire Pikes Peak region.

SDS will provide much-needed system redundancy - an important benefit to all current and future customers - to ensure an uninterrupted flow of water to our community if other parts of the system are closed for maintenance or repair. The 2006 break in the Homestake water pipeline is a good reminder this isn't just a theoretical consideration.

We will build SDS in an environmentally responsible way. That includes how we'll handle construction and how we'll approach the project overall. We will restore land we disturb and ensure impacts are mitigated. We will ensure affected landowners are fairly compensated. And we will do our part to continue improving Fountain Creek. A lot of work remains to be done, but Fountain Creek is well on its way to becoming a regional resource that can contribute to our quality of life and tourism.

We are exploring two routes for SDS - one through Pueblo County and the other through Fremont County - to ensure we are able to build the project.

In our outreach to both Fremont and Pueblo Counties, we have made commitments that the water project will not adversely impact their communities. In fact, we believe there are significant regional benefits.

For example, there will be \$600 million worth of construction in Phase 1 for Pueblo and El Paso counties upon which local contractors can bid. It also means new construction jobs and procuring local goods and services.

The economic benefits are real. And they're more important than ever, given the state of our nation's economy.

The key milestones we have reached are encouraging news to residents of Colorado Springs because this project will assure water today and water for tomorrow. And building the pipeline and associated reservoirs will benefit local contractors, suppliers and other vendors, as well as providing more recreation opportunities for the entire region.

By using the foresight and planning our forefathers did when building our current water system, we can assure the continuation of our vibrant and beautiful city. Let's be forward thinking.

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Rivera is mayor of Colorado Springs.