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Springs group making SDS pitch Team hosts community open house

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FLORENCE — Believing its chance of success in Pueblo is only 50 percent, Colorado Springs Utilities is wholeheartedly pursuing its alternative choice of Fremont County to build the mammoth \$1.1 billion Southern Delivery System.

About a dozen CSU team members hosted a community open house Thursday evening at the Florence Municipal Building to explain the project and answer citizens' questions. Those employees manned various stations to explain the project using poster-sized artist renderings, maps and drawings.

Colorado Springs, Security and Fountain are partnering to seek permission to construct a water intake, three pump stations and 17 miles of 66-inch diameter pipeline in Fremont County to transmit up to 78 million gallons of water each day from the Arkansas River. The proposed intake site is just west of the Colo. 115 bridge over the river.

Because the permit process is a long and arduous one, CSU is working in Pueblo and Fremont County simultaneously to obtain the necessary approvals, although it prefers to draw water from the Pueblo Reservoir and move it north through Pueblo County.

"We're moving through the process, but it's a long process," said John Fredell, SDS Project Director. "We would not spend the time, effort and money to work on this second alternative if it were not completely viable. We'll have to see how this plays out."

Fredell said CSU hosted the gathering to provide information to everyone interested in the project.

He explained potential benefits of the project including a renewed Florence River Park, partnerships with Penrose Water District and Beaver Park Water for water transmission, and considerable economic impact. CSU also has pledged to contract with local businesses for construction and supplies.

"We will hold workshops for procurement procedures and more," Fredell said. "You don't have to be some huge national firm to bite off a chunk."

Water Commissioner Charlie Judge, Division of Water Resources, would welcome the proposed improvements on the Lester-Atteberry diversion and ditch, which feeds several ponds to the east of Colo. 115 north of the river.

“Given the conditions of the current ditch out there,” Judge said, “I would love to see it improved.”

Judge said minimum water flows of 190 cubic feet per second would be maintained at all times. He confirmed Fredell’s statement that CSU’s water rights on the Arkansas River are junior to other water rights there.

“Local municipal water rights are all senior to Colorado Springs, so I don’t see an issue there,” Judge said. “It’s a priority system. First in time, first in line.”

Jack Tyler of Penrose, retired after 40 years with the Bureau of Reclamation, attended the session.

“Their presentation is pretty informative,” Tyler said. “It’s very straightforward and very transparent.”

However, Tyler said he failed to see what Fremont County stood to benefit except for the proposed work at the Florence River Park.

“I’m concerned with the construction disruption and the potential for right-of-way conflicts in the future,” Tyler said. “I don’t see very much benefit to Fremont County compared to impacts.” Colorado Springs Utilities will present its case for a Special Review Use permit during a Fremont County Commissioners public hearing at 10 a.m. Feb. 10. The county Planning Commission voted 5-2 on Jan. 6 to recommend denial of the permit.

CSU will appear in Pueblo County for the same process on Feb. 11, the day after the local hearing.

“We believe it’s likely we could see some conditions then,” Fredell said. “Hopefully, we’ll see the big picture by Feb. 11.”

Fredell said his marching orders are to start the three-year construction project this year.

“We have to have a decision early this summer,” Fredell said. “We’re getting right down to it.”