

Billboard campaign blasts Aaron Million's pipeline proposal

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Environmental groups are turning up the heat on state water regulators with a billboard campaign critical of a proposed Flaming Gorge pipeline.

Regulators are meeting this week to consider whether it's feasible to study the future of the pipeline.

One of the pipeline's chief proponents, Fort Collins entrepreneur Aaron Million, is seeking a federal permit to construct a 501-mile water pipeline from Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Wyoming through Larimer County to Front Range water users.

His proposal, called the Regional Watershed Supply Project, is one of several Flaming Gorge pipeline proposals from Colorado water interests, but Million's project planning has progressed farther than any other.

Environmental groups, including Save the Poudre, the Colorado Environmental Coalition and Western Resource Advocates, vehemently oppose a Flaming Gorge pipeline, calling it a possible \$9 billion boondoggle, a message they tried to convey with the billboards.

"Colorado needs to focus on water conservation and alternatives to major pipeline projects," said Save the Poudre Executive Director Gary Wockner. "Water conservation and other alternatives need to be pushed forward more aggressively before there's any discussion of massive pipeline schemes."

The billboards were placed in Grand Junction, where three major water regulation boards are meeting this week and where conservationists fear people have the most to lose if a Flaming Gorge pipeline were built.

Bart Miller, water program director for Boulder-based Western Resource Advocates, said the pipeline, which could withdraw 250,000 acre feet of water annually from the Colorado River system, could push the state up against the limit of how much water exists in the river basin to be used for municipal and farming purposes on the Front Range.

"If there is a (Colorado River) Compact call,

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that implicates the entirety of the Western Slope," he said.

At its Grand Junction meeting on Tuesday and today, the Colorado River Water Conservation Board is considering whether to fund a state-sponsored task force that would investigate the feasibility of a Flaming Gorge pipeline.

The CWCB is expected to reach a decision on the matter this morning.

"The billboards were placed in Grand Junction because that's where the vote was and the CWCB meeting was," Wockner said.

Million said he met with Western Resource Advocates on Tuesday and said he tried to convey that he wants the pipeline to be as conservation-friendly as possible.

"My interests are environmental and conservation and land use, the same as theirs," he said. "We may in the end agree to disagree with how you handle some of those issues, but at least I want an open dialogue on those issues."

Meanwhile, conservation group Trout Unlimited on Tuesday released the results of a survey of Wyoming voters showing that 90 percent of the survey respondents said they oppose a Flaming Gorge pipeline.

If it's built, the pipeline would withdraw water from the Green River - a tributary of the Colorado River - at Flaming Gorge Reservoir in southwest Wyoming and pipe it over the Continental Divide through

southern Wyoming before entering Colorado in Larimer County.

The survey of 400 Wyoming voters, conducted by Public Opinion Strategies July 31 and Aug. 1, in addition to the polling firm's discussion about the pipeline in focus groups in Cheyenne, showed that Wyoming residents oppose the pipeline because they are concerned about allowing water to leave Wyoming and what it might do to the state's water supplies.

Eighty percent of the respondents said they feel threatened by out-of-state users diverting water from the state, according to a statement from Public Opinion Strategies.

"They think the pipeline is a really awful idea," said Drew Peternell, Colorado director of Trout Unlimited. "It's my expectation that when Colorado citizens learn about the pipeline, they will be equally unimpressed with the proposal."

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