

Groups unite against Flaming Gorge pipeline plan

Written by

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12:17 AM, Jul. 27, 2011|

Nineteen environmental groups announced Tuesday that they oppose Fort Collins entrepreneur Aaron Million's Regional Watershed Supply Project and any other Flaming Gorge pipeline proposal.

A state task force is studying the feasibility of a water pipeline, including Million's, that would pump water 550 miles over the Continental Divide from the Green River at Wyoming's Flaming Gorge Reservoir to Front Range irrigators and communities.

Million's plan would bring the pipeline near Fort Collins, and several Larimer County water and irrigation districts have expressed interest in the project.

Save the Poudre and a group of 19 other environmental organizations led by Boulder-based Western Resource Advocates and the Colorado Environmental Coalition announced Tuesday they oppose any state funding for the task force.

The groups are hosting a "telephone town hall" at 7 p.m. today, which will allow residents from all over the state to hear

why conservation groups oppose a Flaming Gorge pipeline and ask questions about it.

"The point is to discourage the state Water Conservation Board from spending any funding or tax dollars on studying the project any further," said Western Resource Advocates water program manager Bart Miller.

He said the pipeline could cost \$9 billion and be one of the most expensive and environmentally damaging water projects in Colorado history.

"The biggest concern is about whether the cost of the pipeline is something anyone can bear," he said.

In a statement, the groups said a Flaming Gorge pipeline would severely damage the Green River and the reservoir, which is a popular boating and recreation destination in southwest Wyoming and northeast Utah.

Save the Poudre Executive Director Gary Wockner said the state should be spending

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its resources studying less divisive solutions to Colorado's water challenges.

He said that because it's unclear whether there's enough water available in the Colorado River Basin for a pipeline to extract 250,000 acre feet of water annually, the pipeline could spark a water war throughout the West. The Green River is part of the Colorado River Basin.

The groups are urging the state to consider conservation measures over a water pipeline to help solve the state's water supply problems.

"There are a host of alternatives to meet Colorado's future water supply needs, including urban water conservation, water reuse and recycling and voluntary water sharing arrangements between farmers and cities that all should be part of our future," Miller said.

A Flaming Gorge pipeline also is opposed by the Colorado River Water Conservation District whose officials worry that there is too little water in the Green River to support a pipeline.

Million said Tuesday the Regional Watershed Supply Project was designed to keep plenty of water in the Green River for Flaming Gorge and downstream uses.

"There's still ample water for the project to move forward," he said, adding that if major environmental problems are found with the project, it shouldn't be built.

He said he wonders why environmental groups would oppose the task force.

"I, frankly, thought it was a good idea to look at all the underlying issues," he said. "I don't understand why they would oppose an independent entity looking at the project itself."

Conservation groups opposing the pipeline and the task force include Colorado Conservation Voters, the Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society, the Colorado Whitewater Association, Environment Colorado, the National Parks Conservation Association and about a dozen others.

INTERESTED?

The telephone town hall about the Flaming Gorge Pipeline will be a webinar hosted by Western Resource Advocates at 7 p.m. Wednesday. Visit www.westernresourceadvocates.org/pipeline to join the town hall.

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