

The Pueblo Chieftain

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LAST STAND?



CHIEFTAIN PHOTOS/CHRIS McLEAN -- Gary Walker, standing on his ranchland in northern Pueblo County, fears that the Southern Delivery System will further damage the fragile cholla forest on his family's property.



Walker unlocks a gate he shares with the Fountain Valley Project on his ranch.

SPECIAL REPORT: COLORADO SPRINGS PIPELINE: Walker unwilling to give ground without a fight

By CHRIS WOODKA
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

Two questions gnaw at rancher Gary Walker when he thinks about the proposed Southern Delivery System:

Are the thousands of acres of new development in Colorado Springs worth even one acre of his ground?

Should he go to war against “progress” - again - or sell out?

The answer to the first question is always easy for Walker: No.

The second is getting harder to answer.

“I don’t know what it would be like to live in an area where I didn’t have CIG (Colorado Interstate Gas), Qwest, trash from Pueblo West, poachers, tanks coming through my fences from Fort Carson and dust from every direction,” Walker said.

In the latest assault on his property, Colorado Springs proposes to cut across 7 miles of some of the most fragile land on the Walker family’s 25,000-acre Pinon Ranch in northern Pueblo County west of Interstate 25 to bury its SDS pipeline. Walker also owns the 45,000-acre Turkey Creek ranch next door and has several conservation easements that provide a buffer against Fort Carson for Pueblo County.

“If I would have picked the worst route for this pipeline to go, this would be it,” Walker said, driving over some of the rugged ground where the pipeline would be buried.

A trench would be cut near the present route of power lines in an area of the ranch that rises and falls. It’s already susceptible to erosion, as anyone can see from 20-foot deep gullies. Cutting into it could accelerate the erosion and disrupt the delicate ecosystem of the cholla forest on the ranch.

THE GROWING pains from Colorado Springs always seem to wind up on Walker’s back.

In the 1960s, Fort Carson was gobbling up ranchland and ruining what was left. When he ran a sod farm on Fountain Creek, the detritus from Colorado Springs would wash up in the fields after floods. The Homestake Pipeline cut a swath through a ranch he owned in South Park. Scars from the Fountain Valley Conduit, buried on Walker Ranches, can still be seen.

“I’m beginning to think this is personal,” Walker joked.

Then, you realize he may not be joking, because everything about Walker Ranches is personal for him.

Walker and his family have spent years nurturing this land.

It’s more than a cattle ranch. In fact, during the drought the Walkers sold off cattle in order to give the land a chance to recover.

“When I moved here, there were no deer, no elk and about six head of antelope,” Walker said.

ON A DRIVE across the ranch, Walker stops his pickup truck and fishes out a pair of binoculars when he spots a herd of pronghorn on a distant hillside. Two coyotes are frolicking in the chill morning air. Birds are everywhere. Walker is working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to reintroduce endangered black-footed ferrets as a way to naturally control prairie dog populations.

It might be hard for some to understand why this environment means so much. But if you listen to Walker talk about the cholla forest - and it is every bit the forest as trees in the mountains - you begin to understand.

At the base is a ragged carpet of blue grama grass, with transitional brush only a few inches high. Some of the plants are among the rarest in the world. The mature growth are cholla cacti, only a few feet high. It takes more than a man’s lifetime for this environment to develop.

“It was horrendous when they came through here in the mid-1970s,” Walker said, talking about the Fountain Valley Conduit built to serve El Paso County communities as part of the Fryingpan-Arkansas Project. “It’s taken three decades for it to come back.

This is what happened:

There was the obvious inconvenience of having trucks, heavy equipment and workers on the ranch. While Colorado Springs says it will stage construction to minimize impact in SDS, Walker saw just the opposite during the Fountain Valley Conduit era. Trucks would pummel the same few miles of road daily to reach the sites they were working on.

The roads were torn up for years.

The dust was more than a nuisance.

When the winds blew, it covered ground more than a mile in each direction with a thin layer of dust. Cattle die-off from dust pneumonia skyrocketed. Ruts from erosion can still be seen. Non-native rye and wheat grasses were used in the revegetation of the land, and where they took became invasive species. The more critical areas are where they didn’t take. Even today, most of the land above the pipeline itself is devoid of grass, with brush that has washed in from previous floods and could wash out with the next.

During public meetings on the proposed SDS pipeline, Colorado Springs engineers have said there is little “topsoil” along the route they intend to dig up and they will pile it separately and replace it.

Walker scoffed at the idea, and said erosion would soon remove that layer in many places.

At the meetings, there were pictures of revegetated areas along the route of the Homestake Pipeline in South Park.

FROM HIS own experience, Walker knows that it took decades for those areas to come back, and that was in an area that has more rainfall.

“This won’t come back in my lifetime,” Walker said.

The Fountain Valley Authority, led by Colorado Springs, offered the Walkers \$2,000 for the easement across the ranch.

“We went to war,” Walker said. “We settled for \$5,000. We were facing condemnation and had no recourse.”

This time around, Walker is perplexed by Colorado Springs’ actions.

He last had contact with Colorado Springs Utilities in 2002 and 2005, and granted access to the property for what he thought was very preliminary scouting of the pipeline route across his property.

“In 2002, they were going to run along the old easement, and we thought it was the lesser of two evils,” Walker said.

In late October this year, he was sent a letter and some maps about the new route, just prior to meetings that Colorado Springs and its SDS partners held as part of a Pueblo County land-use application.

Walker couldn't believe it.

"They either lied to me or led me to believe something other than what we signed," Walker said. "I called and asked, 'When did I give you permission to run all over my ranch?'"

Walker is still working with the Nature Conservancy to catalogue the rare species on the ranch and cannot fathom how the environmental impact could have been determined without carefully looking at the topography and conditions along the exact route of the pipeline.

Aside from the aggravation, Walker finds a satisfaction with the ranch.

"Look at this view," he said at one point on the tour of the property. "This is possible because we don't want to subdivide."

Walker is not the only one who benefits.

Walker recently declined an offer to put a cell phone tower on the ranch, although he has several on other parts of the ranch. He checked first with Pueblo West Metro District officials and was told it was not a desirable location.

Yet, he is being asked to give up a chunk of his land for an easement he sees as nothing but destructive, for a pipeline that has the full support of the metro district.

"How do I get to win?" Walker asked. "If I try to protect myself, do I have 26,000 people mad at me? I want to be a good neighbor. I'm giving Pueblo West a hell of a view."

PHILOSOPHICALLY, he sees the growth all along the Front Range as a mistake that is increasingly impossible to correct.

"Is this prudent? Tell me how things have gotten any better because of the increase in population," Walker said. "The only person who comes out ahead is the subdivider. Maybe I should join them instead of fighting them."

That's just frustration talking, because Walker clearly wants to protect the ranch and what it means to Pueblo County.

"I just want to be left alone and take care of my family," Walker said. "But I also want my grandkids to be able to grow up and be able to look and see nothing but bare ground from here to Pikes Peak."

Colorado Springs pipeline

While Pueblo County has used its powers under 1974's HB1041 to evaluate projects of statewide interest on other projects, none would have the impact of the proposed Southern Delivery System.

SDS is a \$1.1 billion proposal by Colorado Springs, Security, Fountain and Pueblo West to bring a 66-inch diameter, 50-mile pipeline from Pueblo Dam to meet their water needs through 2046.

The project could start as soon as next year, with completion of the first phase - the pipeline itself and a treatment plant at the terminal - by 2012. Later, reservoirs would be built east of Colorado Springs and Fountain.

Pueblo West would tap into the pipeline only if it comes from Pueblo Dam. Colorado Springs also is considering a Fremont County route.

This special report was prepared to take an in-depth look at the impacts of the proposed project in Pueblo County.

PUEBLO WEST

One couple learns its home of two years is just a pipe dream.

FOUNTAIN CREEK

While Pueblo and El Paso County debate an authority, landowners struggle with floods and erosion.

PAY AS YOU GROW?

Colorado Springs has big plans, but at what cost to themselves and their neighbors?

WHAT DON'T WE KNOW? Even as agencies try to get a handle on SDS, the project keeps changing. How do you evaluate a moving target?

SPEAK OUT

Pueblo Chieftain Publisher Robert H. Rawlings encourages Pueblo County residents to make their voices heard.

PIPELINE ROUTE LEAVES SOME HOMEOWNERS UNSETTLED



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/MIKE SWEENEY -- Jason and Jennifer Parker recently learned their Pueblo West home, built in 2006, sits near the path of the Southern Delivery System pipeline through Pueblo West.

One family is concerned that an offer from Colorado Springs won't cover all of their costs.

**By DENNIS DARROW
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN**

PUEBLO WEST - Jason and Jennifer Parker never figured to live in their first house forever. Just longer than two years.

The Parkers recently learned their new ranch home - built in 2006, the year their daughter Paysley was born - sits right next to the path of Colorado Springs' proposed SDS water pipeline.

The family could stay, and Colorado Springs would pay to relocate a shed and septic system in the pipeline right-of-way. Or, the family could accept Colorado Springs' offer of a buyout.

THE FAMILY IS leaning toward the buyout, and crossing their fingers that Colorado Springs' offer of market value plus relocation expenses won't leave them in a financial bind.

Jennifer Parker said she doesn't necessarily oppose the pipeline - "It's not a bad thing because it is helping Pueblo West" - but she worries a buyout offer won't cover all of the family's actual losses.

Recalling a first meeting with Colorado Springs planners, "Honestly, I'm kind of irritated. They want to give us the bare minimum," she said. "Prices of lots have gone up and houses are more expensive."

The Parkers' house is one of four in northern Pueblo West - a sparsely populated area north of U.S. 50 - that sit close enough to the SDS path that the owners are expected to receive the option of a buyout.

One other house in the same area sits directly in the path and must come down, SDS planners say. The house is owned by Robert Neff and his fiance, Amber Autobee.

At a recent meeting in Pueblo West about the pipeline route, Autobee sounded a lot like Jennifer Parker: "We're a little overwhelmed at the moment," Autobee said.

For dozens of other homeowners, the pipeline would get buried on or near the edge of their land. Each homeowner could expect to see construction activity for about three weeks, SDS planners say.

"I really don't have a problem as long as they landscape," home owner John Cameron said of the route, which would cross the western edge of his young family's 1.25-acre homesite on Canvas Drive.

Yet, he's still somewhat cautious, Cameron said.

"It's not for our public good, it's Colorado Springs' public good," Cameron said. And, of his only communication thus far with Colorado Springs, "it was a really vague letter," he said.

ELSEWHERE, a local Realtor reports having trouble finding a buyer for a vacant home about 10 feet away from the pipeline right of way. Several other homes along the route also stand vacant.

"Three potential sales have been lost," Garth Schut of Re/Max said at a recent public meeting. "The potential buyers weren't willing to wait for the final outcome and/or future compensation."

No outright objection to the pipeline route was voiced by Pueblo West homeowners during a recent series of public meetings on the pipeline route.

The next public meeting will come Dec. 9 when the Pueblo County Commission hosts a formal hearing on Colorado Springs' request for a permit to construct the pipeline.

In all, the pipeline route is expected to impact a 6-mile line of northern Pueblo West. At earlier meetings, Colorado Springs presented an overview of the anticipated impacts.

According to the city:

The 66-inch diameter pipeline would be buried in a trench about 12 to 15 feet deep on the eastern edge of the major utility corridor that already runs through the area.

The utility corridor is easily identifiable because it includes large power lines and a dirt trail used by pedestrians, equestrians and cyclists.

Already buried in the ground in the corridor is the Fountain Valley Conduit water pipeline. The SDS pipeline would get buried just to the east of the Fountain Valley pipeline.

The construction area would run 100 feet wide and be fenced off to prevent access.

About 20 local roads would be crossed.

Under larger roads such as U.S. 50 and Industrial Boulevard, builders would tunnel beneath to avoid traffic tie-ups. Minor roads would be temporarily closed and alternative routes provided.

The main above-ground structures of the pipeline are air vents, drains and manholes.

About six vents (to be installed on higher ground, including some privately held land) and six drains (on lower ground, mostly publicly held land) would get installed.

Manholes would be more evenly spaced and located near roads.

Colorado Springs estimates that construction would impact specific neighborhoods for about three weeks and the Pueblo West community as a whole for several months.

Any disturbed land would be re-landscaped and re-seeded.

Of course, the handful of Pueblo West homeowners closest to the route are faced with far greater impacts, including the likelihood of needing to relocate.

Jennifer Parker said she's still struggling to come to terms with the turn of events. "This is right at holiday time. How much stress is that? What's this going to do to our holidays?" she asked.

IN ADDITION to paying a fair price for the homes, Colorado Springs should keep in mind that all of the affected families are being asked to make personal sacrifices, Jennifer Parker said.

In her case, her family loves its new home and feels like it's just now getting settled, she said. The parents just finished an expensive landscaping project that includes a giant backyard playground set for their daughter, she said. Also, it's not the three of them at the house, she said. Her mother-in-law and sister-in-law also reside at the home, she said.

"Even if you pay them for the house and land that's not enough (compensation) to uproot a family," Jennifer Park said. "It's just not cool. They need to offer a fair number."

Colorado Springs planners say their talks with homeowners thus far were intended only to be preliminary, as the city awaits Pueblo County's decision on its pipeline request.

If the county approves the permit, the city will move to finalize a route for the pipeline and then begin formal negotiations with the affected home- and landowners, they say.

What does a pipeline project look like?







These slides, provided by Colorado Springs Utilities from presentations at public meetings in October, show how Pueblo County property and roads could be affected during a year of construction.

The pipeline would be buried underground and the only parts visible after construction would be vents, drains and manholes.

In the construction process, however, the project would generate dust and noise, close roads and disrupt normal traffic patterns as it crosses 20 roads. Where the pipeline crosses major arteries, like U.S. 50, heavy equipment would be used to bore under the roadway.

Only one pumping station, located below Pueblo Dam, would be built in Pueblo County, and its visual impact would be similar to other facilities already located inside the boundaries of the Lake Pueblo State Park.

GONE WITH THE FLOW



CHIEFTAIN PHOTOS/FILE -- Bill Alt, whose farm near Eden was ruined by floods in 1999, looks at rock put in along Fountain Creek by the railroad after the flood nearly washed out its tracks. Alt is worried that increased daily flows in Fountain Creek could make the next flood worse.



Jane Rhodes and her brother, Frank Masciantonio, have lived on Fountain Creek all their lives and are alarmed by flows that have already cost them part of their property.

GONE WITH THE FLOW

Fountain landowners say floods remain the real issue of SDS

By **CHRIS WOODKA**
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

The day-to-day increase in flows down Fountain Creek as a result of growing communities to the north are slowly chipping away at Pueblo County ground.

The landowners know they are few in number, but say they have already been injured by changes on the Fountain - they call it a river - and feel the county should act firmly in protecting their interests as a hearing on the Southern Delivery System nears.

Base flows in Fountain Creek have increased from almost nothing in the 1970s, to a river that most days flows freely because of effluent releases upstream. As Colorado Springs grew in the 1980s and '90s, more transmountain return flows were exchanged down Fountain Creek. During the 40-year life of the SDS project, Colorado Springs return flows are expected to double.

“The thing they haven’t measured is how much sediment is moved every day,” said Bill Alt, whose farm at Eden was more or less destroyed by floods in 1999.

Driving around Alt’s 120-acre property, one can see what’s good and bad about Fountain Creek.

THE GOOD: Wild turkeys, foxes and owls flit about. Tracks in the sand reveal the deer, elk, coyotes and other critters that use Fountain Creek like an animal superhighway. A pond is home to some fish. Willows and cottonwoods are sprouting in some areas, and an old hay field - now part of a federal flood easement after being destroyed in the '99 flood - is finally sprouting grasses beneficial to the wildlife.

The bad: Part of the “old” Old Pinon Bridge is left over from the 1965 flood. Tires, barrels and buckets have been deposited as “gifts from the Fountain.” Soil is washing off in sheets from a rock bank reinforcement installed in 1999 to protect railroad tracks. Russian olives, salt cedars, thistles and other weeds are overtaking

areas silted over in the most recent flood. In his cousin's adjacent field, an erosion cut has dropped about 20 acres into the river and looks like it's coming back for more. Plastic bottles washed over a 4-foot bank from a minor flood in September.

"The river gives and the river takes away," sighed Alt, who grew up on Fountain Creek and moved back after a 30-year career in the Air Force.

Alt does not blame Colorado Springs and other communities to the north for all the damage to his property, but he also disputes how they have characterized the impacts of SDS on the property owners downstream.

At a meeting last month, engineers working on SDS characterized the deposits left by daily flows as being about as thick as a piece of paper every day at the Eighth Street Bridge. They said the big chunks of sediment that are clogging up the channel through Pueblo are the result of infrequent flood events that move the majority of sediment downstream.

"I don't think I believe that," Alt said. "I don't have the money to hire some big engineering firm to give me the figures I want to hear."

Looking at Fountain Creek tells him a different story.

The creek isn't where it was before the 1999 flood. It's moved a little to the east here, a little to the west there, and that's a natural occurrence. The same flood that cut away parts of his cousin's farm dumped sand and debris onto Alt's farm, making both places useless unless the owners were willing to invest even more - which they weren't.

ON A CLEAR November day, there were big piles of sand sitting in the middle of the creek. They might grow or shrink, move to one side or another, but they form every day. The Fountain is also undercutting the bank, Alt pointed out, looking at some moist chunks of clay freshly toppled from what once was, not too many years ago, the best hay field on his father's farm.

What happens during the next flood? The sediment will move a little closer to Pueblo.

On another part of the farm, there are some natural wetlands - the kind the Army Corps of Engineers has recommended in its watershed study.

"During normal flows and small floods, they are good for the river," Alt acknowledged. "But the wetlands are not going to deter the big floods and could be washed away."

Alt said the county review of SDS should include the landowners' concerns.

"I think Colorado Springs should pay the landowners for every acre the river takes," Alt said.

OTHER LANDOWNERS agree with Alt about the harmful effects of the steady flow of water in the Fountain and that the SDS review process is the place to begin addressing the problem.

"The Fountain River was not meant to carry that much water," said Jane Rhodes, who has lived and farmed on Fountain Creek her entire life. "The damage is greater than in the past. We know what needs to be done, but it's hard to tell these engineers."

Rhodes remembers large floods - not the landmark ones often cited in report - during her childhood were

nowhere near as damaging as events in 1995 and 1997 that started tearing away chunks of fields on her property. The 1995 flood left 300 acres of pasture land useless before it washed away in '99. In 1999, a 15-year flood took out the bridge at Pinon built to replace the one that washed out in the 1965 flood, but those who lived along the creek remember how it was weakened by the floods earlier in the decade.

“As a child in grade school, I could walk across the Fountain, but with the transmountain water, you no longer can do that,” Rhodes said.

Rhodes has worked on the Fountain Creek Vision Task Force for two years and sees it as a real hope that new studies will yield results instead of simply reports.

“The only thing, by law, Colorado Springs is required to do is clean the water coming into the creek,” Rhodes said.

She would like to see some of the committee’s recommendations put into effect, however, as a condition of Pueblo County approval - especially the one to form a special district to oversee Fountain Creek improvements.

Colorado Springs officials, at a meeting last month, said they prefer to keep the vision effort separate from the SDS review.

RHODES IS suspicious, however, because she believes Colorado Springs will say anything in order to get the pipeline. She recalls sitting in her living room looking at the proposed route of SDS with Colorado Springs Utilities representatives six years ago. Despite more studies of alternatives, agreements and a few changes, the plan is essentially the same as it impacts Pueblo County and Fountain Creek, she said.

“They are pacifying everybody, is what they are doing,” Rhodes said. “Pueblo ought to put up a stone wall until they prove they can stop the flows and clean up the river, fix the Fountain.”

All for one? Not certain

Local governments yet to adopt Corps' recommendations

By **DENNIS DARROW**
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

Last summer, the Army Corps of Engineers released a list of general recommendations for Fountain Creek that some watershed experts consider more important than any single creek improvement project.

Unfortunately, it remains unclear how seriously Colorado Springs-area governments are taking the advice, which focuses on adopting rules to control flooding, sedimentation and pollution at the sources.

An effort by the Fountain Creek Vision Task Force to bring local governments together to adopt a unified policy in support of the recommendations stalled following the release of the Corps' list.

There is some movement toward implementation.

As a condition of its proposed SDS water pipeline, the city of Colorado Springs pledges to implement the flood-control suggestions. And the city of Fountain recently adopted many of the ideas.

However, questions persist over long-term monitoring and enforcement. Meanwhile, other parts of fast-growing El Paso County are not bound by any pledges made by Colorado Springs and Fountain.

The strategic plan developed by the Fountain Creek Vision Task Force calls for all of the cities and counties to revisit the issue by 2010 with a goal to pass the new protections.

The task force also recommends the creation of a new governmental entity, the Fountain Creek Watershed District, to oversee creek improvements, including adoption of the new rules.

Pueblo city stormwater chief Dennis Maroney said he considers the Corps' general recommendations among the most valuable information to arise from the agency's \$3 million study of Fountain Creek.

"This is a watershed approach. It's not done by individual counties and municipalities. It's a giant task we have before us but, fortunately, we're starting in the right direction," Maroney said.

The Colorado Springs area is the main target of the proposal because the Fountain Creek watershed is shaped like an ice cream cone with the bulk of the land and population lying in El Paso County.

All of the water from the area then flows into Fountain Creek and into Pueblo.

Still, to the south, Pueblo and Pueblo County governments say they are willing to also consider the tougher regulations as part of any basinwide initiative, and as a way to better protect other watersheds.

"That's the way you address problems, you have to address them together. It requires a lot of cooperation and collaboration," Maroney said.

Charles Wilson, a manager with the Army Corps of Engineers Albuquerque District, who leads the agency's Fountain Creek study, urged local communities to unite behind the suggestions.

"We have accelerated the problems by the developments we've done. . . . It's up to the people in the watershed to take action and make things happen," Wilson said.

Unlike the Corps' project-specific suggestions, none of the general recommendations require federal involvement or federal funding, which are often barriers to implementation, Wilson said.

FOUNTAIN FIXES

A summary of the Army Corps of Engineers' general recommendations for Fountain Creek:

1. Require developers to set aside more open space.
2. Rehabilitate riparian areas where necessary.
3. Create additional wetlands.
4. Limit sediment runoff from construction.
5. Adopt low-impact development standards.*
6. Limit flood flows to pre-development (historic) levels.

7. Limit sediment flows to pre-development (historic) levels.
8. Develop better models for sediment measurement.
9. Require analysis of the impact of new development on two-year storms.
10. Devise ways for better basinwide collaboration.
11. Ensure compliance through project tracking, inspection and routine maintenance.
12. Enlist more expertise in design and inspections of projects.
13. Update FEMA flood plain maps.
14. Re-certify Fountain Creek levees.
15. Emphasize channel stability on any improvement projects for Fountain Creek and tributaries.
16. Use best practices on any creek improvement projects.
17. Create a Fountain Creek Watershed Entity to oversee Creek fix-up.

** * Low-impact development practices minimize stormwater runoff from roads, shopping centers, business parks, residential areas, stadium parking lots, etc. The approach relies on the use of temporary detention ponds, permeable parking lot surfaces, roadside detention channels, etc.

** The Fountain Creek Vision Task Force proposes new state legislation to create the Fountain Creek Watershed District based on Denver's Urban Drainage and Flood Control District.

PUEBLO WARY OF COLORADO SPRINGS' APPROACH TO GROWTH



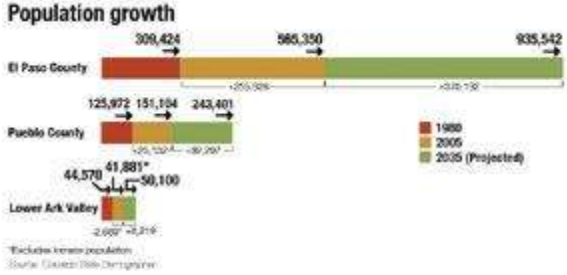
CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/FILE -- Houses crowded together in a neighborhood near Powers Road and Austin Bluffs in Colorado Springs.



CURRENT IMPERVIOUS SURFACE AREA



FUTURE IMPERVIOUS SURFACE AREA



The larger city continues to fight for the larger pieces of the pie.

**By DENNIS DARROW
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN**

Last month, Colorado Springs again pulled out its political guns on Pueblo.

The flashpoint: Colorado Springs' fear of losing the state Department of Corrections headquarters and its 240 high-paying jobs to low-bidder Pueblo.

In lobbying to keep the jobs, seven state lawmakers from the Colorado Springs area fired off a public letter singling out Pueblo for criticism.

"Pueblo may have some fights to pick with us but surely this isn't one of them," the lawmakers state. The letter is titled, "Pueblo shouldn't cry foul."

The letter makes no mention of a similar protest filed by Canon City.

IN DOWN economic times, every growth-minded city can be expected to wage a spirited defense of jobs. And these are down times in the region.

October's jobless rates in Canon City (6.9 percent), Pueblo (6.7 percent) and Colorado Springs (6.6) were the highest of any cities in the state, and well above the statewide average of 5.7 percent.

But it's Colorado Springs' growth tactics - and how the tactics affect its neighbors, particularly Pueblo - that is very much on the minds of Southern Coloradans these days.

It is one of the central issues in the talks over the proposed Southern Delivery System water system.

The pipeline would help provide water for Colorado Springs and its El Paso County suburbs to fulfill a goal of adding 350,000 people in the next 30 years, lifting the area's population close to 1 million.

The pipeline would start in Pueblo County, take Arkansas River water and the return flows - along with all of the extra runoff and flooding from the growing city - would run down Fountain Creek.

There are other growth-related conflicts.

In September, a group of growing El Paso County towns led by Monument was forced to confirm a secret plan was under way to try to buy up water from the Bessemer Ditch.

Divisions also persist over the expansion of Fort Carson.

Pueblo and other communities in Southern Colorado are eager to support, and benefit from, the military base's announced expansion. But the first instinct of Colorado Springs leaders was to expand a major highway interchange south of Colorado Springs, partly to better link the base to nearby Fountain.

At the same time, Fort Carson launched a bid to buy out more ranches near Trinidad to expand the base's Pinon Canyon training site. But top Army leaders treated any offer of compensatory aid to Las Animas, Pueblo and other counties in the region as an afterthought.

Only recently has Colorado Springs championed a more regional approach on Fort Carson. Ideas include

expansion of military-related businesses into Pueblo, a base entrance closer to Pueblo and the possible stationing of a 100-person civilian work force at Pinon Canyon.

If there's a positive from the various fights, it's that Colorado Springs' efforts at dispute resolution is now going full bore, and many Pueblo leaders say the city is in fact working better with its neighbors.

PUEBLO CITY Council member Vera Ortegon's take on the relationship is common among many Pueblo leaders: "I don't trust anybody but, with the leadership there, I think we can work together. Always with the respect but never trusting."

Long term, "Absolutely I think both cities can co-exist and grow," Ortegon says.

On the SDS project: "The one thing that ties us is Fountain Creek and, as long as they protect Fountain Creek and treat us correctly . . . I think it could be good for us," she says.

Others are more guarded.

State Rep.-elect Sal Pace says Colorado Springs' track record does not inspire trust. "A good portion of the fight on SDS is because of Colorado Springs' past activities," the Pueblo Democrat said.

Colorado Springs often comes off as disingenuous, Pace says.

On Fort Carson land needs, "When Pinon Canyon was proposed 30 years ago, there was some talking of doing it in eastern El Paso County. But when it involved taking land there, some guys said, 'No way,' " Pace notes.

On the DOC deal, Colorado Springs - often the first to preach to the rest of the state about its support of limited government - pivoted 180 degrees in defense of keeping the headquarters, even though state taxpayers will pay more, Pace said.

On governance in general: "One of the ironies is Colorado Springs is that it is one of the leading anti-government and anti-tax communities in the state, yet it continues to thrive off big government projects like Fort Carson. . . . They are the ones that are benefitting the most," Pace says.

GOING FORWARD, Pace said he is hopeful but cautious about Pueblo's talks with the city on SDS and a Fountain Creek fix-up.

"I'm hopeful Colorado Springs will open the checkbook and that's when we'll really learn if it's been worthwhile," Pace says.

To whatever extent the relations between the two cities have improved, another factor has been an internal change by Colorado Springs.

In recent years, the city's voters - angry over traffic jams and urbanization - bucked conventional wisdom and passed tax increases to improve roads and preserve open space and parks.

Then came a series of Fountain Creek sewage spills and, in response, Colorado Springs City Council - after a long period of admitted hand-wringing - moved on its own to create a stormwater utility that is paid for by fees imposed on property owners.

Many political observers thought Colorado Springs voters would clean house in retaliation. Instead, voters

upheld the fee at this November's election.

The SDS talks still aren't free of conflict.

Colorado Springs refuses to drop its appeal of a failed lawsuit that sought to strip Pueblo County of any say on the project. It also threatens to move the pipeline to Fremont County - and take away any promises of mitigation for Fountain Creek - if it views Pueblo as making too many demands.

The state's population projections put El Paso County on pace to reach 938,000 people by 2035, a gain of 350,000 people from its current population of 588,000.

Other counties are expected to remain small in comparison: Pueblo to 240,000, up from 150,000; Fremont to 71,000 from 46,000 and the Lower Arkansas Valley counties to 50,000, up from 40,000.

The income levels of the smaller counties are significantly lower and show few signs of catching up. Colorado Springs and Pueblo's median household incomes are far apart at \$46,000 and \$32,000.

The adjustment wasn't made to satisfy its neighbors; it was done at the demand of its own voters.

To many observers, the city's old approach was one of:

Keeping taxes low by funding few infrastructure upgrades.

Hoarding military and defense jobs.

Looking out for No. 1 while putting forth little regional cooperation.

Pace said he thinks an increasing number of voters in Colorado Springs want the city to stop growing, and that Colorado Springs leaders should take notice.

"I have a number of friends in Colorado Springs and they tell me they don't want any more cars congesting their highways, and they don't want any more sprawl. . . . And yet their city leaders keep making that a priority."

Whether the city chooses to keep growing or not, the separate issue persists of how the city responds in the future to any conflicts with Pueblo and its neighbors.

THE CONFLICTS keep arising. And they are varied.

Many in Pueblo haven't forgotten a 2004 broken pledge by Colorado Springs lawmakers to support state subsidy of the Colorado State Fair. (The wound flared anew this summer when a Colorado Springs group hosted a fair of its own in Penrose just ahead of the State Fair.)

And now, the Colorado Springs area appears in line to get the state's next veterans cemetery, an idea that largely originated in Pueblo. Leaders in Pueblo are lobbying for the cemetery to at least go south of Colorado Springs, possibly near the Pikes Peak International Raceway area.

Of course, the projections are just that, and the reality of the next 30 years could prove far different. Right now, Colorado Springs and El Paso County are learning the lesson of many other fast-growing communities, that growth can stop as fast as it starts. The state's 2002 recession, the bust of its local high-tech industry and Fort Carson's prolonged troop deployments have all served to badly stunt Colorado Springs' economy and population

growth.

IN ADDITION to having one of the highest jobless rates in the state, Colorado Springs' housing starts are a fraction of peak levels. And residents are anxiously waiting to learn President-elect Barack Obama's and the Democrat-controlled Congress' priorities for defense spending.

Military and defense spending from the federal government is the lifeblood of Colorado Springs' development, pumping more than \$4 billion a year into the local economy. Any reduction in defense spending could hit the city hard.

If the economy were to keep suffering, Colorado Springs might want to work even closer with Pueblo. The two areas - and the rest of Southern Colorado - might need to combine all of their forces to better compete against an area of the state still growing fast: Denver and the northern Front Range.

Urban lessons: Nothing lasts forever

Cities don't grow indefinitely, and there comes a point at which growth within city limits stops as the suburbs overtake the core city, or people find greener pastures elsewhere.

Colorado Springs doesn't have to look far to find examples of either situation.

To the north, the city of Denver has grown to 550,000 from 514,000 residents in 1970, a paltry 6.5 percent increase. Meanwhile, the Metro area, stretching from Boulder to Aurora, has exploded, showing a 30 percent gain in population in just a decade.

To the south, Pueblo was the second-largest city in the state in 1960, when its growth curve flattened.

While the current trend is for rapid growth in Western cities, the same could be said for the Midwest in the 1950s. Since 1950, the population of major cities like Pittsburgh, Cleveland and St. Louis are half what they were, as people moved to suburban areas.

In El Paso County, the outlying areas have been growing at twice the rate as Colorado Springs, but may not benefit from a project designed to deliver water primarily to customers of Colorado Springs Utilities.

Year	Pueblo County	City of Pueblo	El Paso County	Colorado Springs
2005	151,104	104,124	554,574	384,876
2000	141,472	102,121	516,929	360,890
1990	123,051	98,540	397,014	281,140
1980	125,972	101,686	309,424	215,150
1970	118,238	97,774	235,972	135,501
1960	118,707	91,181	143,742	70,194
1950	90,188	63,685	74,523	45,472
1940	68,870	52,162	54,025	36,789
1930	66,038	50,096	49,570	33,237

1920	57,638	43,050	44,027	30,105
1910	52,223	41,747	43,321	29,078
1900	34,448	28,157	31,602	21,085

AFTER TWO DECADES, SDS STILL HAS MYSTERY ELEMENTS



COURTESY PHOTO/COLORADO SPRINGS UTILITIES -- A conceptual drawing shows how a pipeline hookup to the North Outlet Works of Pueblo Dam, which feeds the Arkansas River, might look. It's one of many changes already made in the Southern Delivery System in the 20 years since Colorado Springs began planning for future water development.

Colorado Springs keeps changing its plans for water delivery project.

**By CHRIS WOODKA
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN**

Back in 1989, there was no such thing as Southern Delivery System.

But there were plans on the books for it.

Big plans.

Sweeping plans.

And plans for a new reservoir on the Arkansas River near Buena Vista. Improvement of lakes in Crowley County. Pipelines coming into Colorado Springs from three directions. Maps that swept the state in a 75-mile radius with potential impacts from a water project that had yet to be articulated.

The first hint something big was happening, to most the outside world, was a water filing in Division 2 water court in late 1990, when Colorado Springs applied for Elephant Rock Reservoir near Buena Vista.

Over the next five years, Colorado Springs evaluated all of the alternatives, infuriating folks in the Upper Arkansas Valley with its Elephant Rock plan. The Friends of the Arkansas, a group 500 members strong, put up signs that still read “Don’t Let Colorado Springs Drown this Valley.”

The plan for an on-channel reservoir was shuffled to the back of the deck in Colorado Springs’ 1996 Water Resources Plan, and the city’s utilities staff started talking seriously about only one option shortly after it was released: a pipeline from Pueblo Dam.

ONE KEY element of the plan was more storage at Lake Pueblo, and engineering reports prepared by the city also looked at the safety of enlarging the reservoir. The Bureau of Reclamation, which operates Pueblo Dam, also was looking at safety in 1997, resulting in repairs on the dam in 1998. Also in 1998, the Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District began looking at ways to find more storage in the Arkansas Valley, resulting in its Preferred Storage Options Plan, recommending enlargement of Lake Pueblo.

While PSOP is evidently a big piece of the Pueblo Dam pipeline plan, it’s apparently one that can wait. PSOP, which would require congressional authorization to study enlargement of Pueblo Reservoir, stalled last year after several thwarted attempts to move a bill in Congress.

Today, the drive to get a pipeline from Pueblo Dam is still going strong, as Colorado Springs and its partners - Security, Fountain and Pueblo West - push for immediate construction and a 2012 completion date.

While the overall thrust of the project remains the same, the details are moving targets that often change, kind of like playing Whac-A-Mole with blueprints.

At the most recent public meeting on Reclamation’s Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Colorado Springs City Councilman Tom Gallagher asked in frustration at his own city: "How do you spend 20 years and \$80 million on a project and still be surprised?"

When Southern Delivery System was proposed on the heels of the state’s worst drought in 2003, it was to be fully evaluated by 2006 and built by 2009. However, it stalled, and the new target date is 2012, supposedly when the current water system will no longer be sufficient to meet the needs of a growing community.

At meetings this fall, Colorado Springs officials have been reluctant to say SDS may not be needed immediately, and have told county residents construction could begin as soon as fall 2009.

Even though the route appears certain, changes have been one of the few consistent features of SDS.

In September 2000, Colorado Springs paid the Pueblo Board of Water Works \$3.5 million to put in a larger pipeline from the joint use manifold at Pueblo Dam. The water board was under the impression that Colorado Springs wanted to connect to the pipeline off a “T” connection east of the dam. The point of connection was even written into a March 2004 intergovernmental agreement.

Nevertheless, during meetings on alternatives in 2005, Colorado Springs still was proposing a direct connection to the manifold, located on the south side of the Arkansas River, with a pipeline under the river.

AT THE TIME, the water board voiced its concern to the Bureau of Reclamation because down the road it would become more expensive to upgrade the manifold so Pueblo could use its full capacity. Pueblo West, the Fountain Valley Authority and the proposed Arkansas Valley Conduit also can use the manifold. Reclamation had still not addressed the issue in the draft EIS, and the water board again squawked.

Finally, during the Pueblo County process, Colorado Springs revealed a new plan to build an alternative connection at the outlet works north of the river, with a possible connection across the face of the dam. While that might be favorable to the Pueblo water board, it is not addressed in the draft EIS, except as an alternative sometime in the future.

While the SDS addresses seven alternatives, Colorado Springs is looking at only two seriously: Coming from Pueblo Dam or Fremont County.

The Fremont County route was added as an option in 2005 because of questions raised by Gallagher. Actually, the route was first proposed in conceptual maps of the Fryingpan-Arkansas Project nearly 50 years ago. Only after Pueblo Dam was built was the route of the Fountain Valley Conduit from the dam chosen.

While it seemed unlikely - during meetings in 2005, Reclamation said the route was too expensive to meet its cost threshold and was included only because of public interest in the idea - it suddenly became the no-action alternative in early 2007.

A no-action alternative is what the Bureau of Reclamation must consider would happen if it denied Colorado Springs the contracts it seeks for SDS.

Prior to the Fremont County change, however, Colorado Springs proposed pumping more water from the Denver Basin aquifers and physically reusing return flows as potable water as its no-action alternative. While that seemed like it would work in 2005, by 2007 utilities engineers had determined it would not yield enough water to support the projected 2046 population.

Colorado Springs also has rejected a plan favored by Pueblo City Council and water board members, local environmental groups and numerous politicians in the Lower Arkansas Valley to build a river intake east of the confluence of Fountain Creek and the Arkansas River.

So many support it because they say it would require Colorado Springs to deal with the water quality on Fountain Creek. Colorado Springs officials say just the opposite would be true, since they would treat the water after it had been pumped upstream.

The draft EIS shows the downstream intake would actually yield more water, and the cost per acre-feet for the firm yield would be less. In fact, the Pikes Peak Regional Water Authority, a group of water users in El Paso County outside Colorado Springs, has its own plans for pipelines even farther east, and a study recently concluded it is economically and technically feasible.

A few years after the SDS pipeline would be built, Colorado Springs plans to construct a terminal storage reservoir.

One of the most controversial aspects of the draft EIS was the choice of Jimmy Camp Creek for terminal storage. It's an important site for archeological and paleontological studies and failed to gain the support of the Army Corps of Engineers in comments on the EIS.

IN OCTOBER, Colorado Springs switched the site to Upper Williams Creek, a site included in one other alternative, in a revised proposed action that is evaluated in a supplemental report to the EIS. The site was not switched in five other alternatives, including either Fremont County option.

In 2005, there were three possible routes through Pueblo County the pipeline could take, and Colorado Springs paid landowners and even took legal action to preserve all three. It now appears only the westerly route, through

Pueblo West and Walker Ranches, is being seriously considered.

Finally, Colorado Springs has since 2005 fought Pueblo County's authority over the project, even though in the 2004 IGA it acknowledged it would have to acquire a Pueblo County land-use permit. While Colorado Springs is appealing a decision by Pueblo Chief District Judge Dennis Maes, it has applied for the permit anyway.

From the beginning, the route from Pueblo Dam keeps surfacing as the most likely route for the SDS pipeline.

It's just that the details keep changing.

Environmental questions remain unanswered



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/FILE -- CSU-Pueblo biology professor Scott Herrmann tests the water below Pueblo Dam for signs of zebra mussels.

Apparently, there is little room in the SDS draft EIS for some concerns that keep cropping up.

**By CHRIS WOODKA
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN**

Some parts of "environmental" are conspicuously missing in an environmental impact statement being prepared by the Bureau of Reclamation for the Southern Delivery System.

After reading the draft EIS, the Environmental Protection Agency wanted to identify the least environmentally damaging practicable alternatives; determine what the health impacts of more water in Fountain Creek would be for Pueblo East Side residents; include the cumulative impacts of the Preferred Storage Options Plan and Arkansas Valley Conduit; look at the cumulative impacts of growth from the Banning-Lewis Ranch on Fountain Creek; and avoid segmenting the project between Corps of Engineers and Reclamation evaluations.

Those were the preliminary concerns relayed by Larry Svoboda, director of the National Environmental Policy Act program for EPA, in his comments on the draft EIS.

None showed up in the next report prepared by Reclamation.

In a supplemental information report, the major change in reasonably foreseeable actions included Colorado Springs' decision to delay a wastewater treatment plant at Clear Springs Ranch - which would have served

development on the Banning Lewis Ranch and which created 20 years of regional conflict as Fountain-area community struggled with their own sewage treatment needs - but not the conduit to the Lower Arkansas Valley or PSOP.

Concerns about growth also were absent.

At a meeting in October connected with Pueblo County's 1041 hearings, Colorado Springs Utilities executives voiced strong support for improving Fountain Creek. But they stopped short of tying progress with the pipeline with cleaning up Fountain Creek.

The EPA is not the only agency complaining about the way environment was treated in the draft EIS.

A coalition of environmental groups, Trout Unlimited and the Sierra Club questioned everything from the narrow purpose and need statement - it looks only at the needs of Colorado Springs and its partners - to the lack of alternative energy sources in running SDS pumps.

They protested the narrow range of alternatives.

They questioned whether the water quality of stormwater would be made worse by increased releases of effluent in Fountain Creek and more impermeable surfaces in Colorado Springs.

They recommended writing Fountain Creek into the EIS, avoid all wetlands (rather than mitigating damages), identifying specific stream flows and ensuring that everything that could be done to conserve municipal water was, in fact, being done.

There are other impacts on water quality that are difficult to determine from the draft EIS. The report looks at broad averages in space and time, but the actual effects could be more dramatic. A chart presented by Colorado Springs Utilities at one of the 1041 meetings in October showed that levels in Lake Pueblo, which now can drop or increase 50 feet in a year and which can vary 15-30 feet in a season, could change by as much as 20 feet once SDS is in place.

The Arkansas River through Pueblo is somewhat protected by a flow agreement under the 2004 Intergovernmental agreement, but the target flows won't be met all of the time, with or without SDS. There are downstream intake alternatives - which Colorado Springs is not seriously considering - that would keep flows whole.

Finally, there are concerns about zebra and quagga mussels - a proven bane to municipal water systems - in Lake Pueblo that brewed up at the same time the draft EIS was being discussed.

"Have they addressed the problem of spreading mussels to other areas through the pipeline?" asked Scott Herrmann, a biology professor at Colorado State University-Pueblo.

Reclamation officials were careful to describe the EIS as a disclosure process for potential environmental impacts, rather than a "yes" or "no" switch for a pipeline.

What's unusual is how tightly defined that disclosure has been.

EDITORIAL



CHIEFTAIN GRAPHIC/CHERI ZANOTELLI --

SPECIAL REPORT: COLORADO SPRINGS PIPELINE

To Our Chieftain Readers:

I welcome this opportunity to address you, the readers of The Chieftain, on a subject of paramount importance to us all: Colorado Springs' proposed Southern Delivery System and its negative impacts on Pueblo and the Lower Arkansas Valley.

The SDS project calls for construction of a massive, 66-inch diameter pipeline to carry 78 million gallons of high-quality water a day out of the Arkansas River through our county to Colorado Springs, 43 miles to the north.

Colorado Springs Utilities already takes huge amounts of relatively clean Lake Pueblo water and sends back to us ever-increasing sewer return flows and contaminated urban storm runoff down Fountain Creek. SDS would make this unacceptable exchange - good water for bad - much worse.

Besides swelling Fountain Creek flows, which cause erosion, sedimentation and conditions for damaging floods, this constant exchange also reduces flows of the Arkansas River through Pueblo. While Colorado Springs benefits from urban growth, fueled largely by water transfers out of the Arkansas Valley, Pueblo property owners and landowners on the Fountain, as well as those on the Lower Arkansas, suffer the damages.

This special section of The Chieftain outlines the scope of the damages - construction impacts on Pueblo Dam, private property along the proposed SDS route through Pueblo West, traffic disruptions on roadways intersecting the pipeline, and the subsequent Fountain Creek erosion of agricultural land, the buildup of sedimentation, deteriorating water quality and the heightened potential for flooding.

It is incomprehensible to Puebloans who have studied SDS to believe Colorado Springs folks' assurances that there will be no more floods here after SDS is built. We know that cloudbursts will happen again in the upper Fountain Creek watershed, beginning at Palmer Lake and covering Colorado Springs. When that happens, landowners along Fountain Creek, Pueblo's Lower East Side and Downtown residents and those in the Lower Arkansas Valley will suffer flood damages far greater even than those in the 1965 flood.

We must, as a Pueblo and Southeastern Colorado community, stand up and say, "No more. Enough is enough!"

Now is the time to be heard. Colorado Springs is required by law, under provisions of House Bill 1041 enacted in 1974, to apply for a land-use permit for SDS from Pueblo County.

The Board of County Commissioners will hold a public hearing on the application, starting at 6 p.m. Tuesday (Dec. 9) in the Jackson Conference Room of the Sangre de Cristo Arts and Conference Center, 210 N. Santa Fe Ave., Pueblo.

Relevant documents are available for public review at the Robert Hoag Rawlings Public Library and the Pueblo County Department of Planning and Development, 229 W. 12th St., Pueblo.

Make your voice heard by submitting comments in person at the public hearing or in writing at the Pueblo County planning offices, 229 W. 12th St., Pueblo, CO 81003.

We need to speak out for the good of Pueblo and of our neighbors throughout the Arkansas Valley.

Thank you,

Robert H. Rawlings, Publisher

Turkey Creek Conservation District urges county to reject SDS permit

By **BILL ALT**

Bill Alt is a third-generation Coloradan whose family has owned property along Fountain Creek for more than 100 years. Here are his comments to Pueblo County on Colorado Springs' land-use permit application for the Southern Delivery System.

Thank you for inviting our comments on the proposed Colorado Springs Utilities' SDS project and request for a Pueblo County 1041 land-use permit.

Turkey Creek Conservation District has had and continues to have serious concerns about the effect that SDS will have on agriculture, people and natural resources within the district. The Turkey Creek Conservation District contains a diversity of land uses and people, all of which will be impacted if the SDS project is allowed to be implemented.

The concerns of my constituents and of the Turkey Creek Board, of which I am president, revolve mostly around the additional surface flows added to Fountain Creek.

It is important to understand that storm surge and flash flood events have already been increased dramatically along the creek from the addition of large amounts of impervious surfaces upstream. This already has led to severe consequences to include: massive flood events, destruction of agricultural diversions and irrigation equipment, deposition of sediment in some agricultural fields and loss of land to others.

With the addition of the return flows from SDS these effects will get much worse. While it is easy to say that flood events are "acts of God," it is not that simple in the case of the Fountain. Contrary to Colorado Springs Utilities denials, flood events are exacerbated by the increased daily flows in the Fountain caused by introduction of hundreds of cubic feet of effluent from upstream sewage disposal systems.

In addition to heavier surface flows there is the concern of degraded water quality.

Several factors already exist that are degrading the quality of Fountain Creek. Chief among these is the sediment load and associated turbidity. Though Fountain Creek can be characterized as a shifting, sandy bottom stream system and some level of sediment load is expected, the current loads are much higher than historically and naturally would occur. An increase in the amount and velocity of surface water flows will add the potential for even higher sediment loads.

It is also a proven fact that the addition of more surface flows will cause greater erosion potential and greater possibility for channel shifting. This potential poses several problems for residents of the Fountain Creek area and downstream users.

Selenium levels already are reported at four times the Environmental Protection Agency-suggested limit in the creek. It has been suggested by independent research and is highly likely that the source of this selenium is the Pierre shale complexes that exist along Fountain Creek.

If erosion is increased, there will be an increase in the amount of this shale being broken down and added to the stream system. This has the potential to increase the already-high selenium levels greatly. Additionally, this has the potential to cause loss of land through major erosion events for residents of the Fountain Creek area. To agriculture, loss of land equals loss of income!

Taking water from the municipal outlet at Lake Pueblo already is shown to have the potential to cause head loss to the Pueblo municipal water system. In addition to this, it will cause a drop in flows for recreation, wildlife and aesthetic values.

The city of Pueblo has a growing economy and recreation is part of that growth. Boating and fishing will be diminished if flows are altered below the dam.

A quick survey of wildlife species that could be impacted on the potential pipeline route shows many that are in great peril and some that are protected at the state and federal level. Some of the species to be negatively affected include burrowing owls, ferruginous hawks, golden eagles, leopard frogs and Arkansas darter. *All* of these species are of special concern either in Colorado or nationally.

The plains environment that this proposed pipeline will cross is extremely fragile from both a wildlife and a hydrologic point of view. Numerous drainages and ephemeral waterways cross the potential grade of the pipeline.

In addition to potential for washout of the pipeline, these waterways are important to many wildlife species and to the prevention of flooding.

Finally, there is a threat to Pueblo County that has been barely considered in the implementation of this project: the threat to public health and human life. An increase in flows in Fountain Creek likely would be absorbed partially by the expansion of wetland areas and standing water. Any expansion of wetland areas and standing water has the potential to increase the level of vector competent (disease carrying) species to the area. Of greatest concern are *Culex* species mosquitoes that are capable of carrying West Nile virus.

It is the view of my constituents and the board of the Turkey Creek Conservation District that the approval of the 1041 permit and subsequent continuation of the SDS project present unnecessary threats to the people and resources of this county.

We, therefore, recommend an outright denial of the 1041 application. However, knowing that there is high potential for approval and that the growth in Colorado Springs may necessitate this, we have the following suggested conditions.

If the application is approved, there should be a clause that allows for the reimbursement of 100 percent or at least 80 percent of any damages to landowners caused by negative effects of this project. Colorado Springs Utilities should be required to take into account sensitive wildlife species and hydrology during the construction process.

On behalf of the people I represent I ask you to take into account the people of Pueblo County and to put the health, safety and economic well-being of this county first in your subsequent decision.

Arkansas Basin protection must be paramount

By **BETSY MARKEY** and **JOHN SALAZAR**

Rep.-elect Betsy Markey of the 4th District and Rep. John Salazar of Colorado's 3rd Congressional District have adjoining districts in the Lower Arkansas Valley.

Water is the lifeblood of rural Colorado. It feeds our farms, our families and our communities. We have always worked to ensure that water quality standards are upheld and will continue to measure proposed activities in terms of potential impact on our water.

Plentiful, clean water is central to the Colorado way of life and a resource that must be available to our constituents.

The proposed Southern Delivery System project is one of these proposed activities that must be carefully considered with these goals in mind. Its purpose is to provide a safe, reliable and sustainable water supply for Colorado Springs, Fountain, Security and Pueblo West.

SDS will have major implications for our constituents and the state of Colorado. It will shape the future of water development on the Arkansas River and the economic growth of the larger region. While we are not opposed to the SDS, we believe several issues must be sufficiently addressed before it moves forward.

First, this project must benefit the entire region. While users of the SDS will certainly benefit, it will impact downstream users in Pueblo and the Lower Arkansas River Basin, as well.

As the representatives for Southern Colorado, we will fight to protect the water rights of our constituents. We believe we can be good neighbors with Colorado Springs if that city implements SDS in a manner that not only meets its own needs, but also supports the health of the Arkansas River Basin. Colorado Springs should have access to water it lawfully owns, but not at the expense of downstream communities.

Second, this project should not go forward until we have adequately addressed impacts on the Fountain Creek.

Currently, Colorado Springs sends its effluent down Fountain Creek and then exchanges that flow for higher-quality water out of Lake Pueblo. The effluent, plus the storm runoff from the growing number of impervious

surfaces in Colorado Springs, has greatly increased the flow down Fountain Creek, causing more flooding, more erosion and greatly adding to the sedimentation that dumps into the Arkansas River in Pueblo.

Finally, we need to consider the water issues that communities and farmers may face in the future. While the SDS will ensure that the participating communities have the quality and quantity of water they seek, we need to open our eyes to the growth our communities have experienced and the effect that it has had on our neighbors.

We hope Colorado Springs will continue to work with the Arkansas River Basin to help solve the serious issues affecting downstream users.

The location of the intake pipe must be thoroughly analyzed and intergovernmental agreements should be taken into account with deliberate consideration.

We can all agree that a lot is at stake. This has been a long, arduous process, but we need to ensure that we continue to make the right decisions for both the present and the future.

This is our home and we need to preserve it as best as we can.