

Agency to handle only part of permitting for water pipeline

ST. GEORGE, Utah (AP) — A federal agency’s decision to pass on permitting for much of the Lake Powell Pipeline has opponents cheering the move they say will bring increased scrutiny while supporters maintain the project is still on track.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission announced Thursday that it had submitted an order that it would only handle permitting for hydroelectric facilities in the 140-mile (225-kilometer) pipeline project, [The Spectrum reported](#) .

The commission said other agencies will need to handle permitting on pipeline sections in their jurisdictions.

“The Commission will not act as the ultimate decision maker for approving any portion of the overall project beyond the discrete hydropower facilities,” the order states. “In addition, the Commission will not be responsible for determining which alternative route for the water delivery pipeline should be chosen.”

The project aims to pump up to 77 million gallons (291 million liters) per day from the reservoir straddling the Utah-Arizona border. Utah filed in 2016 to tap into its rights to Colorado River water, proposing to pump it to its fast-growing counties.

The pipeline will require permission to pass through lands controlled by the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation and the National Park Service, as well as privately owned and state lands.

The decision provide clarity moving forward, letting the state know what agency is responsible for what, said Ron Thompson, general manager of the Washington County Water Conservancy District.

“Frankly, it was hard to move this along when you didn’t know exactly who was making the calls here,” Thompson said. “Now we have that certainty.”

The decision could help the state avoid a costly and unnecessary project, said Zach Frankel, executive director of the advocacy group Utah Rivers Council.

“This is great news for Utah taxpayers because there is an abundance of less expensive water sources available to Washington County for a small fraction of the pipeline’s cost,” Frankel said. “Perhaps the Division of Water Resources will be forced to acknowledge these alternatives instead of pretending they don’t exist.”

Information from: The Spectrum, <http://www.thespectrum.com>