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GREEN RIVER DIVERSION

Developer of Wyoming-to-Colorado pipeline project looks to add hydropower to mix

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The Denver Post

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The architect of a plan to pipe water 560 miles from southwest Wyoming to Colorado's booming Front Range is expanding his vision to encompass hydropower.

Entrepreneur Aaron Million on Friday also invited collaboration on his \$3 billion project.

But skepticism, environmental issues and uncertainty surround it.

A south-metro group simultaneously is pressing ahead in a rival effort to sustain future growth by diverting water from the Green River-fed Flaming Gorge reservoir in Wyoming — before the water flows into the heavily subscribed Colorado River Basin.

Colorado government officials and water authorities have called for a stakeholder dialogue to explore the overall concept more carefully.

"New supply is certainly one of the legs of the stool" for meeting Colorado's water needs, said John Stulp, Gov. John Hickenlooper's senior water adviser, who planned to participate. "If the concept has enough interest, and there's not any fatal flaw or red flags, then they'll probably go to a second phase."

Million welcomed the interest.

"When we started this project, nobody had ever considered the Flaming Gorge options," he said. "We'll do everything we can to facilitate that discussion."

The Million Conservation Resources Group received offers of "several hundred million dollars of equity capital" to build a pipeline, Million said. He declined to give details.

"The water is to be developed for the citizens of this state. We wanted to assist with the supply in the municipal areas," Million said. "On the agricultural side, you believe adding water to the system will help



Aaron Million invited collaboration on his Wyoming-to-Colorado water project.

municipal areas," Million said. "On the agricultural side, we believe adding water to the system will help alleviate the continuing dry-up of agriculture along the Front Range."

Moving water could help generate electricity for the nation's power grid, he said.

Million recently asked the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which regulates construction in wetlands, to suspend work on the environmental review of the project initiated by the agency.

He likely will pursue permitting through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission instead, he said, due to the emerging "alternative energy" dimension.

Million said elevation changes between Wyoming and Colorado enable generation of 70 megawatts of power and that this could be increased to 500 to 1,000 megawatts.

Army Corps regulatory specialist Rena Brand confirmed her review is on hold until July 5 while Million talks with FERC officials.

FERC's review process is more structured, Million said, with firm deadlines that could help him meet a 2 1/2-year timetable for securing permits.

Meanwhile, opponents are raising concerns that the proposals to divert 250,000 acre-feet would hurt fish and other aquatic life in the upper Colorado River Basin.

"This is an expensive and technically complicated wild goose chase," said Stacy Tellinghuisen, senior analyst at Boulder-based Western Resource Advocates, an environmental-policy group.

"As an entire pipeline, this would be a net consumer of energy" because diverted water would have to be pumped across the Continental Divide, Tellinghuisen said.

Launching a stakeholder dialogue now "makes no sense" and "will divert resources and attention from more realistic solutions," Colorado River District manager Eric Kuhn said in a memo to state round-table members.

The south-metro water group — led by Parker Water and Sanitation District manager Frank Jaeger and South Metro Water Supply Authority director Rod Kuharich — has been meeting with municipal authorities in Wyoming and Colorado.

"Collaboration on a project like this is critical," Million said.

South-metro officials couldn't be reached.

Among major water providers, Northern Water Conservancy District managers "are supportive of however we can figure out how to get additional water to the Front Range so that we are not drying up agriculture," spokesman Brian Werner said. "We think this idea definitely deserves study."

A delayed state study was supposed to find out how much water may be available for diversion under the interstate compact that governs use of the Colorado River. California, Utah and Nevada count on it. Current estimates for Colorado's unused allocation range from zero to 800,000 acre-feet.

"The reality is we've overdelivered to the lower- basin states since 1922," Million said. "Those surplus waters that actually belong to the upper basin have been used to generate economic development in the lower-basin states."