

Kiowa County hires water broker for Arkansas Valley

Lamar man will buy shares and farmland in attempt to prevent Front Range pumping

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PUEBLO — Kiowa County has hired a broker to purchase water and farmland in the lower Arkansas Valley as part of a plan that would bar shipping the water to Denver.

The county has hired Dean Scranton of Wholesale Realty and

Auction Co. in Lamar to act as its broker.

The issue reached a head as Fort Lyon Canal shareholders are considering an offer by Colorado Water Supply, a subsidiary of Colorado Interstate Gas. The company proposes pumping water to Front Range cities if it can buy 50% of the canal's shares by Feb. 28 and develop it in future years.

Under Kiowa County's plan, the water would remain in southeastern Colorado, said Commissioner Burl Scherler. The land will be resold to others interested in farming.

Letters have been sent to all Amity Canal shareholders inquiring about potential sellers, Scranton said.

The purchase offers also may be extended to shareholders of the Fort Lyon Canal.

Water purchased will be used to develop a permanent pool in the Great Plains reservoirs northwest of Lamar, Scherler said. The water would be used for recreation and most would be returned for farming purposes.

Scherler said the Kiowa County plan offers alternatives to those who need to sell their water but

don't want it to leave the valley. The commissioners have negotiated with bonding companies and feel confident their plan is viable.

A \$100,000 study of the Great Plains reservoirs was conducted six years ago to explore possibilities of developing a state park. The current plan to purchase water fits well with those studies, Scherler said.

"There has to be pass-through water in the lakes to maintain good fishing," he said. The water purchases would make that possible. Scranton has been authorized to offer 180-day options to sellers

from Amity or Fort Lyon. Price will be negotiated on an individual basis, Scherler said.

Farmers will have the opportunity to sell and then repurchase land and water under the Kiowa County plan.

Elwood Gillis, a former legislator heading a task force trying to keep water in the valley, sees the Kiowa County offer as a "win-win" for everyone.

"It has all kinds of potential," Gillis said. "It can be used for recreation and create diversification from agriculture for the valley."