

# Puebloan worries about changes to river

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*The Pueblo Chieftain*

In the wrangle over water rights and water use, John Zupancic wonders who speaks for the Arkansas River.

Zupancic, a fisherman, a kayaker and a fireman, is concerned that the river itself — and the habitat it provides for birds, fish and small animals — is being ignored in the face of other issues.

He worries that the Pueblo Board of Water Works' proposal to move its intake upstream to Pueblo Dam will significantly reduce river flows in the winter.

And he wonders how the water board's proposal will affect the city's plan to restore the river corridor if

funding from Great Outdoors Colorado and the Army Corps of Engineers can be obtained.

"The river is classified as cold water from the dam to where Wild Horse Creek comes in," Zupancic said. "We always thought that part was underutilized by fishermen. Now, we've got this \$3.5 million restoration plan that looks like it's going to happen, but all these other things are starting to kick in."

In fact, said Terry Book, director of operations for the water works, connecting directly to the municipal outlet at the dam has been a prospect for three decades.

"The water board started talking to the Bureau of Reclamation about it in 1968," Book said. "We're still working with the

bureau. We have submitted an application to connect to the outlet at the dam, and the bureau is considering the application.

"We would hope to be negotiating for the terms of the contract within 60 days.

"Aug. 1 we would hope to have a contract awarded, and we'd give the contractor two winter construction periods."

A 5 1/2-mile-long pipeline would carry water from the reservoir to the expanded Whitlock Treatment Plant, which the water board hopes will be on line by May 2002, Book said.

The board wants to move its intake to the dam — it now takes water from the Arkansas near the former prison honor farm and near the old water treatment plant below City Park — because of

better water quality and the pressure that would result. The water pressure would reduce the power used in pumping water during the treatment process.

Book said he understands Zupancic's concerns.

"He's trying to protect the fishery in the river, but there's a lot of other people affecting the flow of water in the river besides the board of water works.

"Under normal circumstances, there's going to be water in the river — water to meet WestPlains' and St. Charles' needs — whether the water works takes water or not. Those obligations have to be met no matter what."

WestPlains Energy takes water from the river just below the Fourth Street  
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bridge, and St. Charles Mesa Water District takes its water just downstream of the Santa Fe bridge.

Book said during the past few winters more water than was necessary to meet the water works, WestPlains and St. Charles obligations — approximately 45 cubic feet per second (CFS) — was in the river.

"In most times, it's been about 100 CFS. On Tuesday, there was 210 CFS in the river."

Book said customer demand determines the amount of water the board of water works takes from the river. In winter, it's approximately 20 CFS and in summer, approximately 100 CFS.

Steven Meier, a planner for the city, said he doesn't think moving the water works' intake would adversely affect the Arkansas River Corridor Legacy project.

"If we know they're going to take out a certain amount, we can design the facilities and account for it in our planning," Meier said. "I don't think it's going to be too detrimental.

"I think where it will really be noticed is below the St. Charles

take-out."

The river project really is two in one: The Pueblo Arkansas River Fisheries Restoration and the larger Pueblo Arkansas River Corridor Legacy Project.

The city hopes to get a grant from the Army Corps of Engineers to do the fisheries restoration, and a Legacy grant from GOCO for the corridor project, which would add six access points to the river; replace 6 miles of existing river trail; and create three environmental education sites.

Meier said a concept paper for the project is due in mid-January, and a full application for the \$5 million Legacy grant will be submitted in late February or early March. The city should know in May if it has been awarded the GOCO grant.

Zupancic thinks the public ought to have a say in what happens to the river flowing through its community.

"My whole point is to let the community decide," he said. "I think what's at stake is the river.

"When they put the dam in, it

was 'jobs, growth, recreation,' but nobody thought about it as the end of the river.

"The rivers ended when dams went up in the West; they became agricultural canals. No thought was given to ecosystems or animal habitat."

Zupancic said everyone is concerned about their rights to use the water.

"I'm just speaking for the river," he said. "You don't see anybody else wanting minimum flows for the blue heron."