

The Pueblo Chieftain

FRANK S. HOAG, General Manager, Publisher, President — 1904-1963

FRANK S. HOAG, JR., Chairman, Publisher, President — 1931-1989

ROBERT H. RAWLINGS, Publisher and Editor

Water worries

THE NEWS last week that the city of Aurora wants to buy all remaining shares of the Rocky Ford Ditch Co. was chilling. Aurora already owns 56 percent of the shares, purchased from an investment company about 10 years ago.

The Denver suburb is offering a gross price of nearly \$60,000 per share for the remaining shares, or more than \$19 million. However, the cost of legal and engineering work and revegetation of land that would be dried up would be deducted from the gross price.

Shareholders were told the net price would be about \$56,000 per share. We'd suggest that this figure be questioned closely, for the associated costs of a transaction could be considerably higher.

Rocky Ford residents — indeed, everyone in the Arkansas Valley — should be concerned about the ill effects of such a sale. Farming is the economic backbone of the valley, supporting the economies of the communities along the river.

Granted, by law the shareholders can sell their water rights to Aurora, but that doesn't mean their neighbors won't be hurt. Even one farm's closure and the attendant loss of the water from the valley has harmful effects.

There is less productive land to generate taxes for schools, roads and law enforcement. There is one less farmer to buy implements, seed and fertilizer, to buy a new car, or get a haircut. And there is less water in an already over-appropriated river.

Multiply one such closure and sale many-fold and the effects can be devastating. When large expanses of Crowley County were taken from production and the irrigation water was sold to Colorado Springs and Aurora in the 1980s, the county's tax base suffered enormously.

Revegetation efforts have been spotty. It is highly difficult to successfully transform land which has been under irrigation for years back to natural prairie.

Recall when Colorado Interstate Gas tried to buy a controlling interest in the Fort Lyon Canal and pipe much of the water to the sprawling Denver metropolitan area. Thankfully, a majority of shareholders turned that proposal down.

The future stability of the Arkansas Valley is dependent upon keeping the water in the valley. Any effort to sell it to northern Colorado should be fought with all resources available.

Everyone in the valley has a stake in this.