

80 Consultant promotes water bank idea for Colorado

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The Pueblo Chieftain

COLORADO SPRINGS —

Water banking already is practiced in Colorado, but it's just not called that, a Fort Collins consultant told state water officials Friday.

John Clark, who helped draft a detailed outline of how a water bank might work in a Colorado Water Conservation Board study of the Fort Lyon Canal, spoke to the Colorado Water Officials Association at the Le Baron Hotel.

The 46-page water-bank outline is one of several alternatives listed in the report, which was prepared after Colorado Interstate Gas in late 1991 attempted to buy a majority of the Fort Lyon Canal — the largest ditch system on the Arkansas River — and sell it to Fort Collins Water

Conservation Board. The Fort Lyon Canal is leased from cities or the Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District to farmers at anywhere from \$8 to \$15 an acre-foot.

Clark said there are no buyers for the water now, or sellers for that matter.

The Fort Lyon Canal's board of directors and shareholders have been cool to the idea, Clark said.

But as water becomes scarce or as cities use more and have less water to lease, the plan will become more attractive.

Clark envisions a water bank of 5,000 acre-feet in the Fort Lyon system. An acre-foot supplies the needs of a family of four living in the city. The 5,000 acre-feet would be obtained from 13,782 acre-feet of diversions, about 6 percent of the Fort Lyon's average annual diversion of 211,000 acre-feet. The difference represents the water's yield, leakage, evaporation and transit losses.

Clark said new, as yet unspecified, industrial uses or the need for cities like Lamar or Las Animas to improve water quality will create the need for water

banking on the Fort Lyon.

He maintains that water could be banked under state engineer's rules, rather than taking the politically challenging route of

changing state legislation or the costly route of attempting to obtain a court decree.

According to the report, the advantages of water banking are

that water rights would remain in the Fort Lyon Canal — or any other system that adopts it — while giving farmers an alternative way to make a profit.

There would be no permanent water transfers, such as those that dried up Crowley County, and no permanent loss of the agricultural economy.

The water bank also could allow for more growth within the area; enhance wildlife or recreation; and allow market forces, rather than regulation, to set water prices, the report says.