

Sent: Wednesday, March 4, 2020 10:59 AM
To: Fitzwilliams, Scott -FS; Inglis, Blaine - FS; Klein, Matthew - FS
Cc:
Subject: Comments on Application of Colorado Springs and Aurora for Drilling in Homestake Valley

March 4, 2020

Mr. Scott Fitzwilliams

Supervisor, White River National Forest

Dear Supervisor Fitzwilliams,

These comments elaborate on the comments made by Dr. Warren Hern, Chair of the Holy Cross Wilderness Defense Fund, dated January 30, 2020 referencing a drilling application by the Cities of Colorado Springs and Aurora. My comments elaborate on alternatives that are available to the Cities. I also viewed a public hearing in Eagle County in February, 2020 about the Memorandum of Understanding Process.

One can hardly disagree with the degree of change that has taken place since the time the Cities of Colorado Springs and Aurora acquired water rights in the Eagle River basin. Where does this leave us in 2020? I have been an active part of this for the last sixty years. In my opinion, it is a matter of working together for the good of the people. The Homestake II process led and the Memorandum of Understanding process. That process is ongoing, but needs to consider a wider range of alternatives than currently is the case. In particular, it needs to recognize that activities can be limited to areas already impacted by development. There is no need to stray from the Upper Eagle River and its East Fork Tributary and the well-established rail/transportation corridors and well-developed mining properties which can be modified. The idea of doing more wetland damage in the Homestake Valley and compensating by restoring part of the Camp Hale wetlands makes no sense, especially since both were part of the original WWII reservation. It is a waste of money to plan wilderness boundary changes and more water projects in the Homestake valley.

My Article in Vail Daily in August, 2019 also is relevant to alternatives and is taken from their website below.

Holmes: One solution to numerous water projects

[News](#) | August 8, 2019

Jack Holmes
Valley Voices

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There are at least five water-related project proposals being considered for the Upper Eagle River Valley from Dowd Junction to the top of Tennessee Pass in the next 50 years. These include several tributaries of the Eagle River.

One combined project could take care of all major stakeholders and turn the area into a model for the future. The alternative will be five decades of litigation and a patchwork of projects that will be costly to all communities.

It is not about who will get the water. That is settled by Colorado Water Law and the 1989 Memorandum of Understanding. It is about whether the parties involved will work together, which happened during the drought of the early 2000s, or go in separate directions, which was the case during the middle 1950s.

The common project would be an Upper Eagle Pipeline and Storage Co. from Dowd Junction to Tennessee Pass. Storage, if needed, could be at Bolts Lake and Camp Hale. The 20-mile-long pipeline would follow the route of the Eagle River, the Railroad, the U.S. 24 highway or some combination thereof depending on what works and preserves the existing scenic corridor between Dowd Junction and Tennessee Pass.

That is the lowest continental divide pass in the Central Rockies. Those wanting to move or store water would need to pay accordingly. A trench and bury pipeline approach would seem to a good approach.

This proposal would give all major parties what they need at a reasonable cost. Memorandum of Understanding obligations could be met. To be sure, this would require some compromise. Camp Hale restoration might need to shift from some limited and expensive wetland restorations to a series of small reservoirs but probably would get more visitors to honor the 10th Mountain Division. Extensive wetlands are a few miles away on Homestake Creek in the original Camp Hale boundaries.

Building the one project pipeline and reservoirs would require funding, but it should cost less than tunnels, which are problematic to begin with because of potential seismic activity that would destroy the tunnels. In fact, the concept could be sold as a demonstration project worthy of grant funding.

While moving of water is not attractive to environmentalists, the concentration of project impacts in a well-established corridor makes sense. To be sure, the rail corridor would need to be preserved for possible future use, but an adjoining pipeline could be helpful in this regard.

If Front Range communities are more willing to pay for initial construction than Western Slope entities, the first phase of the project could start at the junction of Fall Creek and the Eagle River.

A major environmental question is how much effort should be spent to erase existing environmental impacts in the Eagle River and its Homestake Creek tributary basins above their lower Red Cliff junction. Such actions could merely shift impacts to the other basin at great public and environmental expense.

Anybody familiar with these issues knows that this proposal is a simplified summary. However, it also is known that 50 years in court and countless engineering and field hours can be curtailed by working together. The public has every right to insist that every attempt be made to arrive at a unified approach. While there are some good studies of limited areas, consideration of the larger area is missing at this point.

Jack Holmes is Professor Emeritus of Political Science at Hope College in Holland, Mich., and vice-chair of the Holy Cross Wilderness Defense Fund. He has backpacked in the Holy Cross Wilderness since 1959 and is a summer resident on Homestake Creek above Red Cliff. For many years, he taught a summer course on wilderness politics.

Thank you for considering this input.

Jack E. Holmes

Vice-Chair, Holy Cross Wilderness Defense Fund. Copy to Dr. Warren Hern, Chair,
Holy Cross Wilderness Defense Fund.