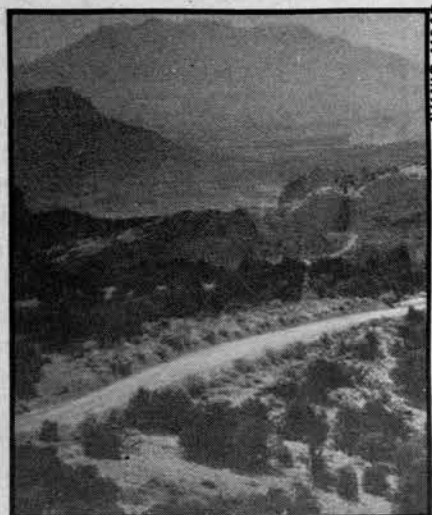


HOTLINE

Utah votes for paving



Scott Smith

A six-week debate in the Utah Legislature ended late last month when legislators approved spending \$1.7 million to start paving the Burr Trail. The 66-mile dirt road has been a point of contention for years between country commissioners who say paving will bring tourists, and conservationists, who say paving will destroy the canyon country. Conservation groups spent more than a week lobbying against the bill, which they called fiscally irresponsible and imprudent. A Congressional subcommittee is expected to hold hearings on the advisability of paving and a compromise offered by the Park Service is pending (HCN, 1/20/85).

Wilderness drops

Several Colorado conservation groups are not pleased with the BLM's recent recommendations for wilderness in northwest Colorado. Of eight wilderness study areas in the Little Snake area, the Bureau of Land Management recommended for wilderness only one 36,000-acre area called Diamond Breaks, near Dinosaur National Monument. Mark Pearson of the Sierra Club says failing to also recommend Cross Mountain, which straddles the Yampa River as it heads toward Dinosaur, was "the most outrageous action (of the agency) in recent memory." Cross Mountain's 1,000-foot-deep gorge through white-water is good habitat for eagles, antelope, mule deer and elk, and may have good potential for oil and gas. Public hearings were held earlier this month, but written comments or requests for copies of the agency's resource management plan and environmental impact statement can be sent to BLM, 455 Emerson St., Craig, CO 81625.

Groups push land buys

A coalition of a dozen environmental groups is urging Congress to oppose a moratorium on land acquisitions as proposed by the Reagan administration. The coalition wants Congress to spend \$327 million in fiscal year 1987, plus another \$75 million in matching grants for states. The money would be used to buy privately owned lands, which are generally inside or next to national parks or forests. According to George Frampton, Jr., president of The Wilderness Society, "The longer we defer these purchases, the more the land will cost." Money for land acquisitions comes from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is mostly made up of money from offshore oil drilling leases and royalties. Each year as much as \$900 million may be spent to buy lands for conservation purposes.

Denver opts for a huge reservoir, maybe

The city of Denver appears to have decided to build the giant 1.1 million-acre-foot Two Forks Reservoir on the South Platte River, 30 miles southwest of Denver. If built, the \$337 million project would have enormous environmental effects.

It would provide water for continuing Front Range growth; wipe out an irreplaceable world-class Front Range fishery; and set the stage for construction of new transmountain diversions.

The latter could dry up high mountain streams in national forests and wilderness areas in western Colorado, within the Colorado River basin. And the Colorado Division of Wildlife has estimated that it would cost over \$200 million to mitigate the destruction of the South Platte trout fishery.

The decision by the Denver Water Board to seek federal permits to build Two Forks is a curious one which can be read in a number of ways. A March 4 policy statement which accompanied the decision is a sensitive, well-written document which does not attempt to hide or gloss over the impacts of Two Forks or the difficulty the board faced in reaching the decision.

And while proceeding with the paperwork for Two Forks, the board also voted to work toward metering 88,000 unmetered homes in Denver, and to pursue smaller low-impact or no-impact water projects. Finally, the application for the Two Forks permit is itself ambiguous, since the board is seeking permission to build both the full 1.1 million acre-foot project and a smaller 400,000 acre-foot project in the same location.

To a large extent, the five-person board appears to have adopted most of the suggestions for conservation and for low-impact projects made by the Front Range Environmental Caucus. This coalition of Denver area groups has spent much time and money on technical analyses.

The Caucus has concluded that conservation, small projects and water exchanges and sales among various water systems can keep the Front Range wet into the next century. The caucus has concluded that Two Forks is not necessary. Colorado's rural Western Slope, whose Colorado River basin streams would provide the transmountain water needed to fill

Two Forks, has also opposed Two Forks.

However, Denver has been under heavy pressure from its suburban neighbors to build Two Forks. Although Denver itself, at 500,000, has stopped growing, it is the main source of water for the suburbs around it. That relationship has been formalized through an agreement signed in 1983 between Denver and 43 water suppliers around it. The suburbs, organized as the Metropolitan Water Providers, say that the South Platte Participation Agreement requires Denver to proceed with Two Forks. They have adamantly opposed suggestions that conservation of smaller projects could take the place of Two Forks.

Dan Luecke, an Environmental Defense Fund staffer and member of the Caucus, says, "The suburbs don't want water -- they want Two Forks." In Luecke's opinion, the demand for Two Forks is based on fear that Denver will dole out water, tap by tap, using the water to maintain political control over the region. By comparison, if the suburbs and Denver build Two Forks together, Denver and the suburbs would be in the same financial boat, forced to sell as many taps as possible to recoup their investment.

The policy statement the Denver Water Board released when it made its Two Forks decision in early March is unlikely to reduce the Providers' suspicions. In the first paragraph, the six-page document talks of the need to address "not only our water supply and delivery, but our needs in transportation, air quality, urban design and environment, plans for wise coordinated growth, accommodation of our community's disadvantaged citizens, urban financial demands, and maintenance of an appropriate city infrastructure."

Denver, under Mayor Federico Pena, has made no secret of its desire for help from growing, generally well-to-do suburbs such as Aurora, Arvada, Littleton and Westminster. Denver says its hospitals, libraries, museums and other institutions must take care of the region's collective health, welfare and cultural needs. It seeks help in supporting its charitable hospitals, libraries and museums.

Denver also appears more concerned than the suburbs about the

long-range effects of the area's air pollution, traffic congestion, lack of public transportation and unplanned growth, and is seeking to involve the suburbs in joint planning and action. The suburbs, typified by Aurora, which boasts of growing to the Kansas border, seem less concerned with quality of life issues and more concerned with continued expansion.

Luecke suggested that any attempt by Denver to demand suburban cooperation as the price for water would enrage the suburbs. So, he said, the Two Forks proposal may be a goodwill offering -- a gesture of sincerity on the part of Denver. In addition to filing the permit for Two Forks, Denver said metering and the planned small projects would allow it to sell taps until at least the end of 1988. Denver had planned to cut off tap sales to the suburbs at the end of this year.

If the Environmental Caucus is correct about conservation and small projects providing plenty of water, and if Denver, this time, pursues conservation vigorously, it could be that Two Forks will not be needed for decades. But Two Forks may now have a life of its own. The suburbs and Denver together are spending an astronomical \$30 million on an Army Corps environmental impact statement to explore the water needs of the Denver metropolitan area. The suburbs, which have put up 80 percent of the money, see the EIS as a Two Forks EIS, and neither they, nor perhaps Denver, may be able to accept a "no action" conclusion that cost \$30 million.

But Luecke said the Caucus is not pessimistic about the ultimate recommendation the Corps will offer when it completes the EIS this year. According to Luecke, the evidence against the need for Two Forks is so strong the agency could decide against the project.

Much of the reduced need for Two Forks comes from the falling growth rate on the Front Range. For example, two years ago, more people migrated out of the 1.6 million-person area than migrated into it. And Front Range developers are complaining that the national press now writes about the Denver area's pollution, congestion and sprawl rather than about its sparkling mountains.

--Ed Marston

Sagebrush Rebellion has been crushed

Iver Peterson of *The New York Times* reports that the Sagebrush Rebels have been beaten back in the West, and that native Westerners have joined newcomers and Easterners in working to protect the region against privatization and exploitation.

The March 5 story quotes people on both sides of the conservation-development struggle. The conservation proponents are generally pleased with the way the battle is going. Those on the other side of the issue, such as Harry Roberts of the Wyoming Heritage Foundation and Connie Brooks of the Mountain States Legal Foundation, expressed frustration with events.

According to the story, the conservationists have turned back the Reagan administration's attempts to sell off public land, to increase sales of timber in national forests, to let large leases of federal coal, to build more

dams, and to block the preservation or reintroduction of such species as grizzlies and wolves.

Moreover, Peterson wrote, Western state legislatures, which are traditionally conservative, "are beginning to pass pro-environment laws that challenge federal and local development plans." The setbacks to the environmental agenda, he said, lay in the movement's inability to control grazing on Bureau of Land Management range and to provide access to public land surrounded by private land.

Gov. Bruce Babbitt, D-AZ, and a possible presidential aspirant, declared the Sagebrush Rebellion "utterly dead, buried and forgotten." He attributed its death to the awakening of a native Western conservation movement that had lain dormant, but that is now alive and growing. He said conservation-minded Westerners had formerly allowed those on the East and West coasts to carry the fight for them, but in the last few years have decided to come out of the closet.

--Ed Marston

BARBS

301 But there is such a thing as free cancer.

A consultant for the tobacco industry told Congress that restricting smoking in federal buildings to protect

non-smokers would cost \$500 million, in the form of smoke breaks and no-smoking signs. Professor Robert Tollison of George Mason University warned: "There is no such thing as a free lunch."