

BUFFALO BULLETIN

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Bull Creek Reservoir gets more expensive

Longer construction time and higher costs in store

By KRISTI SHALLENBERGER
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The cost estimate for the proposed Bull Creek Reservoir project has grown to a staggering \$102 million, a 57 percent increase from the original \$65 million estimate. The increase

however, does not appear to have killed the project, but may prolong the project's application.

Jason Mead, head of the Dam and Reservoir Division of the Wyoming Water Development Commission, told the more than 20 stakeholders gathered at the Johnson County Fire Hall on Aug. 14 that the project price tag was going to increase and that they might have to wait a little

longer for the reservoir. The meeting brought together government agencies, ag producers and outdoor enthusiasts to learn the fate of the project.

The audience gasped when project manager Dylan Wade, of Wenck Associates Inc., revealed a new \$102 million price tag for the reservoir.

A contracted WWDC feasibility study uncovered \$37 million in additional costs. The original project

estimate was a mistake, Wade said during the meeting. Originally, the WWDC planned a 9,600-acre-foot reservoir before revealing a larger 11,300 acre-foot design but failed to update their estimate, Wade and Mead said.

Mead said the state Legislature and the WWDC consider the Bull Creek Reservoir project important because of the water shortages

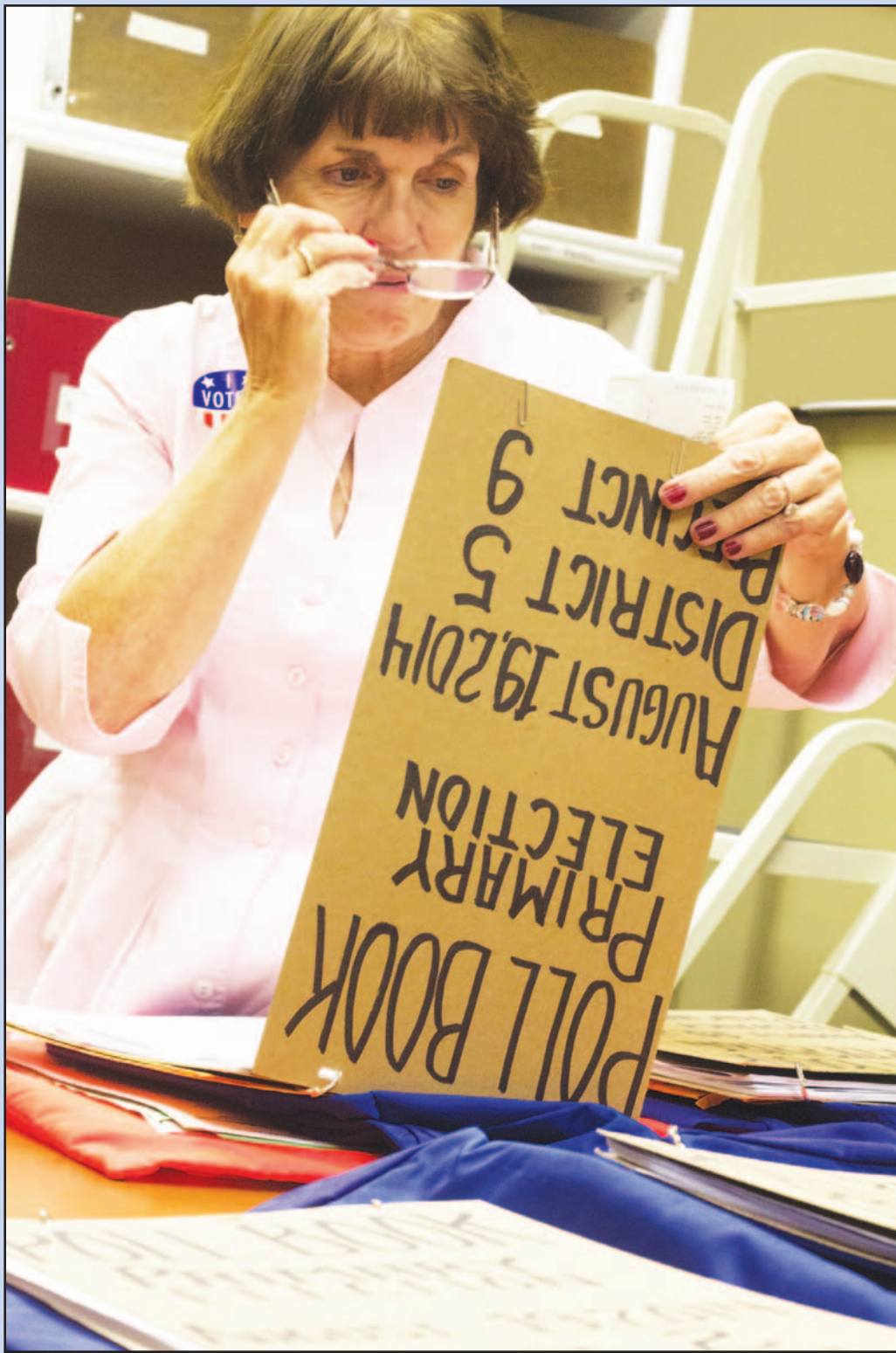
throughout the state, but don't prioritize it over other projects because water shortages exist throughout Wyoming.

"It's a good investment," Mead said, but added the price will grow the longer the Legislature waits to approve the funding.

BULL CREEK

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Big changes for Johnson County



Bulletin photo by Emma Kennedy

Visibly tired after over 13 hours on the job, Trudy Thorburn of the Johnson County Clerk's office awaits the Kaycee ballots in order to determine the winners of this year's primary election. Final tallies were counted by 8:13 p.m. Tuesday nominating two new county commissioners, a new county attorney and the incumbents for sheriff and state representative. Four of five city council candidates will move forward to the general election, as will both mayoral candidates.

Ruby wins in landslide victory

By KRISTI SHALLENBERGER
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Challenger Tucker Ruby trounced first-term County Attorney Kenneth DeCock in the Republican primary Tuesday. Ruby garnered 75 percent of the vote, compared to DeCock's 21 percent.

Ruby's campaign focused on competence, integrity and dependability. DeCock was never able to gain traction with his campaign that focused on experience, fiscal responsibility and an outsider perspective.

RUBY

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Kozisek holds tight to sheriff's job

By KRISTI SHALLENBERGER
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Johnson County Sheriff Steve Kozisek netted another four years as the top law dog, edging out his two opponents with 58 percent of the votes in Tuesday's Republican primary.

Kozisek beat out his challengers, Richard Burrige and Angela Lloyd-McHenry, and said that his experience and leadership abilities were key to his victory. They were also the main tenants of his campaign.

Kozisek has been sheriff for the past 12 years. He began his law enforcement career 42 years ago. After a stint in the U.S. military in Texas, he and his wife, Elaine, came back to Wyoming, where he began his law enforcement career in Newcastle and later joined the Johnson County Sheriff's Department.

SHERIFF

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Novotny and Greenough break from the pack

By KRISTI SHALLENBERGER
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It was a race that kept everyone on the streets guessing, but the winners of the Johnson County commissioners race emerged Tuesday night. Political newcomers Linda Greenough and Bill Novotny broke from a pack of seven candidates to win the Republican Party's nomination with 17 and 18 percent, respectively, of the vote.

Top vote getter, Novotny, is a seasoned politico, though this is the first time he has run for office. His campaign focused on fiscal responsibility and a fresh perspective.

PACK

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County Commissioner

Bill Novotny	1,084 votes	18.97%
Linda Greenough	972 votes	17.01%
Gerald Fink	844 votes	14.77%
Rich Hall	815 votes	14.26%
John Gibbs	644 votes	11.27%
Donald Paulson	458 votes	8.02%
Betsy Willoughby	276 votes	4.83%
Nathan Williams	80 votes	1.40%
Write-in	7 votes	.12%

County Attorney

Tucker Ruby	2,167 votes	75.85%
Kenneth DeCock	618 votes	21.63%
Write-in	9 votes	.32%

County Sheriff

Steve Kozisek	1,676 votes	58.66%
Angela Lloyd-McHenry	647 votes	22.65%
Richard Burrige	499 votes	17.47%
Write-in	11 votes	.39%

State Representative House

District 40

Mike Madden	1,546 votes	54.11%
Jenny Wuerker	1,194 votes	41.79%
Write-in	3 votes	.11%

Mayor

Michael Johnson	927 votes	63.32%
Randy Dyess	457 votes	31.22%
Write-in	20 votes	1.37%

City council

Russ Humphrey	652 votes	22.27%
Wes Haskins	613 votes	20.94%
Scott Madsen	544 votes	18.58%
Jessica Misslin	488 votes	16.67%
Brian Zigmont	227 votes	7.75%
Write-in	13 votes	.44%

Clerk of District Court

Debra Vandell	1,864 votes	65.24%
Jim Roberts	702 votes	25.57%
Write-in	1 votes	.04%

Trustees decided on school traffic routes

By EMMA KENNEDY
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Three traffic routes and six police officers in the Burritt Street area on Tuesday morning will do their part to make sure more than 800 eager students reach their respective schools as the 2014-15 school years begins amid a construction zone.

The Johnson County School District has been under pressure in the past month to formulate a plan of attack for the first day of school as street construction work continues to block access to the Cloud Peak and Meadowlark elementary schools, as well as portions of Clear Creek Middle School.

Superintendent Gerry Chase had set Friday as the deadline to solidify traffic and bus routes; he said he worked with

the school district's transportation director, the Buffalo Police Department and the city of Buffalo to make it happen.

The plan is to have all buses run 15 minutes earlier in the morning and five minutes earlier in the afternoon to help separate bus and parent vehicular traffic.

Each school will have a different traffic route in an attempt to ease congestion, and staff will be on hand to greet and help parents and students get to the correct areas.

"I think the message is to be patient

Bell schedule

Meadowlark Elementary
First bell - 8:10 a.m.
Last bell - 3:27 p.m.

Cloud Peak Elementary
First bell - 8 a.m.
Last bell - 3:20 p.m.

Clear Creek Middle School
First bell - 8:10 a.m.
Last bell - 3:30 p.m.

and take your time," Chase said. "Be sure to look and pay special attention to those younger citizens who might be walking or riding their bicycle to school. And we ask if employers on those days could be flexible. It's important to take your child to school on the first day, visit with their teachers, make sure it goes well. It really sets the tone on the first day for the rest of the year."

The school board was told at its July 14 meeting that the construction, although initially projected to

be complete by the start of the new school year, was running behind schedule because of factors such as a wetter-than-average spring and unforeseen water line issues.

"I think the main thing is if we get them in safely and back home safely and at school they have an experience with value and meaning and can focus on their learning instead of this construction, then we're doing all right," Chase said. "With people's cooperation and understanding, we need to make the best of it. It's the situation we've been handed, and it'll be a measure of how well we can deal with these things."

SCHOOL

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Bulletin photo by Emma Kennedy

Officials outlined school routes for parents and buses that is intended to ease congestion for the start of school next week. Those routes can be found on page A17.

Eight-day outlook

provided by www.weather.com

Thurs. Aug. 21

PM T-storms
High 80°/Low 53°



Fri. Aug. 22

Scattered T-storms
High 76°/Low 54°



Sat. Aug. 23

Scattered T-storms
High 66°/Low 49°



Sun. Aug. 24

Scattered T-storms
High 65°/Low 46°



Mon. Aug. 25

Sunny
High 74°/Low 51°



Tues. Aug. 26

AM T-storms
High 73°/Low 51°



Wed. Aug. 27

Sunny
High 75°/Low 53°



Thurs. Aug. 28

Mostly sunny
High 83°/Low 57°



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Bull Creek

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The project price tag is at the higher end of comparable projects, with the cost averaging out to \$9,000 per acre-foot, Mead and Wade said, but it is comparable to the Tie Hack Reservoir that, when adjusted for a 3 percent per-year inflation, averaged \$8,000 to \$9,000 per acre-foot.

"History tells us it's not cheap to build storage on the east side of the Bighorns," Mead said during the meeting.

The Bull Creek Reservoir project conceptualizes water storage for both the Clear Creek drainage and the French Creek drainage (Hopkins Irrigation District), which encompasses roughly 8,000 acres of irrigated ranch land. These drainages typically experience late-season irrigation shortages.

"That's why we began looking at the project," Mead said.

Clear Creek typically runs very low during the summer, shutting off irrigators who hold junior water rights and affecting fisheries, Mead said.

Junior water rights typically relate to anyone who holds water rights with a priority date after 1890, Wade explained. Wyoming water rights are based on first in time, first in right.

If the Bull Creek Reservoir project comes to fruition, ranchers would likely enjoy late-season irrigation instead of scrambling for extra water and experiencing water shortages during dry years.

It all began when ...

The Hopkins Irrigation District spurred the WWDC to explore options for increased water storage when the district applied for a study examining options for the French Creek drainage in 2006. The Lake DeSmet Conservation District followed in 2007 with its Clear Creek Watershed Rapid Watershed Assessment identifying water availability as one of the top issues in the drainage.

These reports and others afterward revealed that the water required for crop irrigation in the Clear Creek drainage exceeded the actual water available. The WWDC then hired Wenck Associates Inc., formerly States West Water Resources, to probe the options.

Wade compiled 50 years worth of data from past and present studies, including information about identified sites. After whittling down a long list of possibilities to 12, the WWDC decided that the Bull Creek location provided the best opportunity.

The low environmental impacts from building a dam and reservoir on Bull Creek appealed to the WWDC. Bull Creek is an ephemeral stream, with water only running through after storms. Few, if any, wetlands surround the creek, Wade said. The proposed pipeline could impact elk herds during construction, but only temporarily. The 9.2 miles of buried pipeline to the reservoir would moderate those impacts, Mead said.

Their second best option would have been the Camp Comfort site where the north fork and south fork of Clear Creek meet and might be slightly cheaper, Mead informed the stakeholders during the meeting, but the environmental impacts are greater.

The first site must be significantly more expensive than an alternative site with greater environmental impacts for the alternative site to pass the permitting process, Mead said.

The WWDC just completed the first step in the feasibility study to determine whether or not the commission can push ahead with the reservoir.

How feasible is this project?

The commission contracted RJH Consultants Inc., a geotechnical and water resources engineering firm out of Colorado, to conduct a geotechnical investigation of the bedrock for the proposed dam and reservoir site.

Edwin Friend, the project manager for RJH Consultants, discovered that sandstone interspersed with thin layers of clay and siltstone composed the bedrock under the proposed site.

This makes for a sturdy and safe, but highly permeable foundation, Friend said, increasing the chances for water to leak out of the reservoir foundation. The potential seeping waters decreases efficient storage. Two options, including a barrier wall and a compacted clay liner,

were tossed around as possibilities but quickly discarded as too costly or incompatible with the geological structure of the site.

The WWDC settled on a synthetic liner as the best option, Friend said. The synthetic liner depends on two layers of material composed of a plastic layer on top of a sponge-like layer containing clay material that will halt seepage.

However, the synthetic liner strays from a more traditionally built dam and costs more than \$23 million, Wade said.

Wade justified the liner's costliness by illustrating the need to cover the entire 355-acre reservoir plus the embankment of the dam to reduce possible seepage.

Some slight variations will be made to the dam. Most dam designs include an impervious core, a chimney filter and a blanket drain, Wade said. Fine-grained material composed of compacted clay creates a barrier preventing water from seeping through the dam, he said, but the liner replaces the impervious core.

However, the dam will require more sand filters than usual because the blanket filter must cover the 40-acre footprint of the dam's foundation. Both Wade and Mead cautioned that the design is subject to change when actually presented to the commission as a feasible project.

"What we have is a technically feasible project," Mead said. However, the project must wade through several more layers of testing before settling on a final design. The project could be halted at any phase if the site doesn't meet National Environmental Policy Act requirements or if a more suitable site is found after more testing.

The breadth of the project

The Bull Creek dam and reservoir project has been pitched as an 11,300-acre-foot pool to store excess spring and runoff from Clear Creek for irrigation, recreation, fisheries and municipal use for Buffalo.

A feeder pipeline roughly 3 miles upstream from the Buffalo Water Treatment Plant above Mosier Gulch will divert water through a 9.1-mile pipeline to the reservoir, Wade said, with

a 6-mile pipeline diverting water to the French Creek drainage.

The WWDC allocated 4,600 acre-feet for supplemental irrigation storage, 3,200 acre-feet for flatwater recreation, including fishing, and 1,500 for the city of Buffalo. Roughly 2,000 acre-feet returns to Clear Creek for fisheries.

The 355-acre surface footprint of the reservoir occupies roughly 70 percent private land and 30 percent state land, Wade said. The reservoir will potentially utilize 241 acres from three private landowners, with state land assembling the remaining 114 acres. The 21.2-mile pipeline will also run through 23 landowners' property, with 10 miles of the pipeline crossing the city of Buffalo and state property, Wade said.

The WWDC also explored expanding the 11,30 acre-foot pool to 14,500 acre-feet, burgeoning the irrigation pool to 7,800 acre-feet, but it doesn't yet know the feasibility of expansion. The other previous allotments remain the same, Wade said.

Enlarging the reservoir ensures that the reservoir could store more of the excess spring runoff from the Clear Creek drainage to carry over water for dry years, Mead and Wade said. And a bigger reservoir begets larger costs.

The 14,500 acre-foot reservoir comes with a whopping \$112 million price tag, which drew gasps from the already sticker-shocked crowd at the meeting.

Both Friend and Wade admitted a shortage of skilled labor and inflated costs for construction supplies play a role in the new costs. The inflated unit prices coincided with Colorado's need for supplies to repair the extensive flooding from this past year, according to Wade.

"The long term might be 3 percent per year," Wade said, "But it's pretty scattered when you look at short-term and location-specific variables and that kind of stuff."

The reservoir's future

Right now, the project exists in the preliminary stages. The beneficiaries of the project, which include the irrigators and the city of Buffalo, must approach

the WWDC governor-appointed commission and the Legislature for funding approval before any project would move forward, Mead said. This could take place during the 2015 session.

Partnerships have yet to be established, Mead told the assembled stakeholders.

Though the Dam and Reservoir Division boasts a \$170 million account balance that could easily cover the reservoir, a dozen projects and studies statewide also demand funding. The WWDC plans to explore all opportunities, including partnerships with the local irrigators and the city of Buffalo to split costs, Mead said.

Mead also mentioned another alternative: requesting a full grant from the state, but only if there's enough benefits to the state such as flatwater recreation and improving fisheries in Clear Creek. Mead also doesn't know future operation and maintenance costs and who would be responsible for the costs has yet to be worked out.

But Mead reassured the assembled group that the WWDC plans to work out costs for potential irrigators and other beneficiaries, including the city of Buffalo.

The WWDC plans to negotiate a good price so the irrigators won't use their entire net profit paying for water, Mead said.

If the funding process works out, the process for complying with the National Environmental Policy Act should begin in 2016.

And if that goes smoothly, Mead anticipates construction beginning in 2019.

"But that's the best-case scenario," he said. "The NEPA process can be unpredictable."

Despite the new developments and sticker shock, a consensus for the reservoir ran through the crowd.

"It's complicated, but it really benefits the city and irrigators," said retired attorney Bill Omohundro, who owns a "very small" ranch where the proposed pipeline would cross. "It would give us a better chance for more water in the summer."

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- Dash Inn
- Hardee's
- Huzzy's
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