



ARKANSAS VALLEY CONDUIT MONTHLY REPORT

Thursday, May 21, 2026

This monthly newsletter summarizes activities related to the Arkansas Valley Conduit and is made available to the Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District Board of Directors and Arkansas Valley Conduit stakeholders. To request a subscription to the Report, please contact info@secwcd.com or view it at <https://www.secwcd.org/>

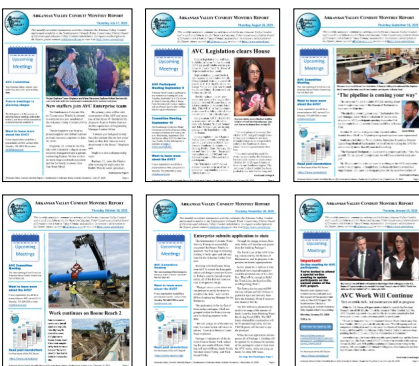


AVC Committee

The next meeting of the Arkansas Valley Conduit Committee has not been scheduled.

Want to learn more about the AVC?

If your organization would like a presentation on AVC, contact Chris Woodka, 719-289-0785 or email chris@secwcd.com



Read past newsletters

For past issues of the AVC Report:

<https://www.secwcd.org/>

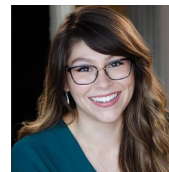


Ryan Warner/CPR News

Rancher Kevin Karney, of La Junta, shows the iron that gathers on a float trap in his water filtration system.

Karney: Safe drinking water an uphill battle

Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District AVC Committee Chairman Kevin Karney was featured on Colorado Public Radio on April 19, 2026.



By Hayley Sanchez
Colorado Public Radio

Kevin Karney held up evidence of the problem in his own backyard — the coating on his hands after dipping them in his well water.

“I’m going to show you how much iron we have in our water here,” Karney said during a spring day in March. “Yep, totally red.”

Karney, a rancher in southeastern Colorado, built an elaborate filtration setup behind his home to

make his water drinkable. It pulls from a deep aquifer and runs through multiple stages — a cistern, filters, a softener and a reverse osmosis unit — before reaching his faucets.

Even with that system, the water requires constant attention.

Radionuclides — uranium and radium — can attach to iron particles in the water, making them harder to remove. Long-term ex-



Read story online at [KRCC website](#)

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‘Without water we have nothing.’ — Kevin Karney

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posure to these radioactive elements has been linked to cancer and other health risks.

“All that iron just collects on everything that’s brass there,” Karney said. “You have to use brass fittings because unless it’s brass or stainless steel galvanized stuff, this water will just eat it up.”

His setup has protected his family from contaminants in groundwater that serves much of the Lower Arkansas Valley. But it comes at a cost, and one many neighbors can’t afford.

“There are individuals that are on a rural system ... that they then get notices that tells ’em that their water is not safe to drink,” Karney said. “So a lot of them ... you’ll see just like you have here, bottled water.”

Across communities like La Junta, access to safe drinking water remains uneven. It’s a patchwork of personal fixes, bottled water and uncertainty, he said.

Karney acknowledged that his system requires a significant investment and is not within everybody’s reach.

That gap, he said, explained why he continues to advocate for the Arkansas Valley Conduit, a decades-long effort to deliver treated water from Pueblo Reservoir to communities across southeastern Colorado.

“That’s why the conduit is so important,” Karney said.

The region’s economy depends on agriculture, which thrives in the valley’s climate with hot days and cool nights.

“That’s what makes the Brix, the sugar content, go way high in the produce,” Karney said. “There’s a lot of peppers and cantaloupe and melons and onions and everything that (is) grown here in the lower Arkansas Valley ... they’re the best in the country,” Karney said.

While irrigation supports crops, drinking water poses a different challenge that has recently faced another setback.

A federal bill tied to the conduit’s financing was vetoed in December, delaying progress and raising new uncertainty.

For Karney, the path forward remains clear.



Ryan Warner/CPR News

Rancher Kevin Karney, of La Junta, at his pump house.

“It means then we just have to continue our efforts to get the legislation passed,” he said.

A former Otero County commissioner and current board member of the Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District, Karney avoided speculating on the politics behind the decision. But he remained optimistic that the project would get done in his lifetime.

“I think we’ll have it successful and completed here in the next 10 to 12 years,” Karney said. “We are playing the long game.”

His perspective comes from years of experience with water challenges in the Arkansas River Basin. The shortages and competing demands have shaped daily life in southeastern Colorado since before President John F. Kennedy authorized the project in 1962.

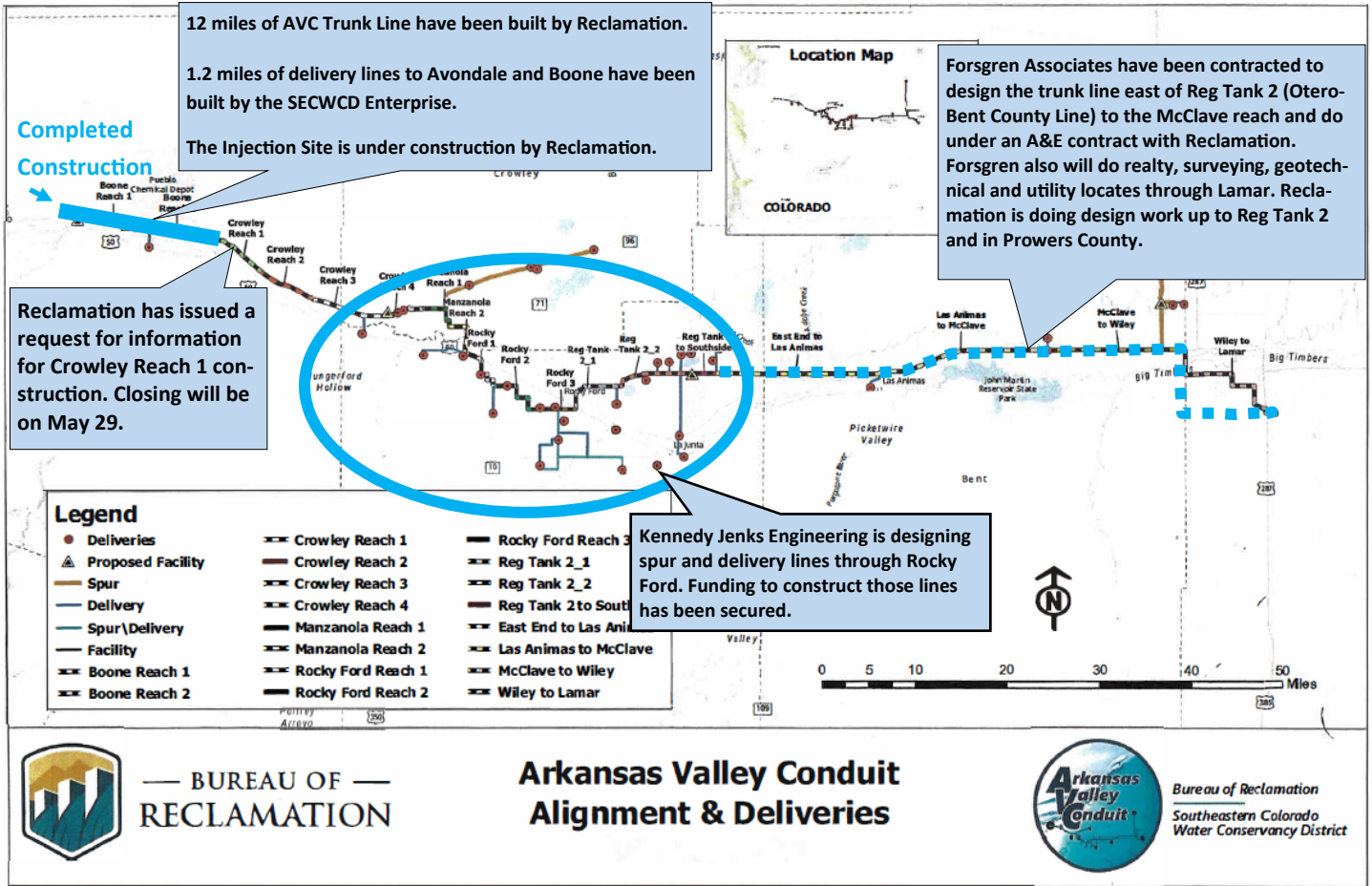
And for Karney, the stakes extended far beyond his own ranch.

“Without water, we have nothing,” he said. “For the future of the Arkansas Valley and for residents here, we have to have water of quality to drink ... and without it, we don’t stand a chance.”

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AVC PROJECT UPDATE



Work is continuing along the entire route of the AVC with design contracts that will lead to construction in following years.

AVC FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Congress and the Conduit

We continue the effort to make the repayment of the 35 percent cost share affordable by lowering the interest rate and extending the repayment period.

Congresswoman Lauren Boebert successfully worked to include the provisions of H.R. 131 (previously vetoed) in the House appropriations process at the full committee level.

Floor action is expected in June.

Meanwhile, Board President Bill Long and Executive Director Leann Noga met with Senate appropriations staff requesting their support for the same step. Earlier this spring, Senator Michael Bennet submitted an official request for inclusion of the H.R. 131 provisions in the appropriations process.

In addition, the AVC maintains a line item in the Bureau of Reclamation budget and construction continues with funding awarded to AVC under the infrastructure bill.



In the Spotlight

The Arkansas Valley Conduit was featured at the 26th Annual Arkansas River Basin Forum in Salida on April 23, 2026. Reclamation Eastern Colorado Area Office Manager Jeff Rieker, Southeastern District Executive Director Leann Noga and Senior Policy and Issues Manager Chris Woodka discussed the history, progress and status of the AVC Project with about 150 in attendance at the session.

AVC meets with participants, updates resources guide

The Arkansas Valley Conduit team from the Southeastern Colorado Water Activity Enterprise hit the road during the final week in April to firm up delivery points and discuss water resources with water systems that are in the first design package for AVC spurs and delivery lines.

They were joined by representatives from Kennedy Jenks Engineering, which is designing the lines under a grant from the Colorado Water Conservation Board that is being administered by Otero County, serving as the Enterprise’s fiscal agent.

“The information shared during our conversations was very helpful and has moved us another step closer to our next project milestone — the 90 percent design completion,” said Hunter Willits, AVC Project Manager for the Enterprise.

“We value the cooperative relationship we have with each of the participating entities and remain committed to being transparent, responsive, and helpful as the project moves forward.”

As communities continue planning for future AVC water deliveries, we would also like to note that, if you have not already engaged an engineering firm to evaluate or design the plant upgrades necessary to

receive AVC water, it may be beneficial to begin that process soon. Early coordination can help support planning, scheduling, and future implementation.



Photos, pages 6-7

The following engineering firms have been involved with AVC-related work and may be helpful resources. You are, of course, welcome to work with any firm you believe best meets your needs.

- GMS (Jason Meyer 719-659-6507)
- AECOM (Curt Thompson 303-968-4477)
- Jesik Consulting (Andy Jesik 719-621-4703)
- Kennedy Jenks (Greg Sekera 303-570-4622)
- Bay Engineering (Xueha Bay 720- 474-0941)

The Enterprise also has updated its Funding Guidance Document, which provides information to AVC participants on funding for improvements that may be needed for activities such as chlorine disinfection, pH adjustment, additional water storage, pressure boost pumping or cross-connection backflow prevention.

For questions, contact Hunter Willits at (719) 766-4259 or hunter@secwcd.com.



AVC Enterprise Sub-Project



Package 1

- Avondale Water and Sanitation
- Town of Boone
- Town of Fowler
- Town of Olney Springs
- Town of Crowley
- Town of Ordway
- Crowley County Water Association
- 96 Pipeline Company
- Sugar City
- Manzanola
- Valley Water Company
- Vroman Water Company
- Patterson Valley Water
- Fayette Water Association
- Eureka Water Company
- City of Rocky Ford
- Hilltop Water Company
- Newdale-Grand Valley Water Company
- West Grand Valley Water Inc.
- South Swink Water Company

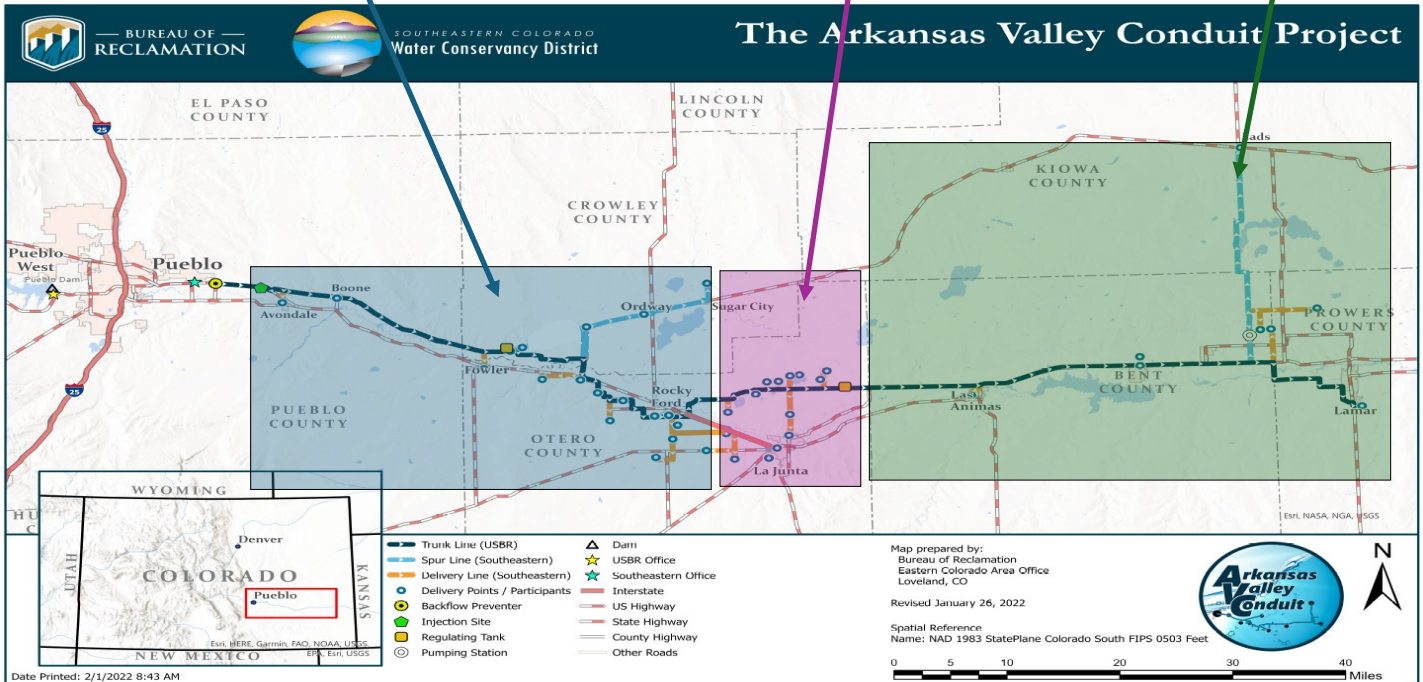
Package 2

- Riverside Water Company
- North Holbrook Water Company
- West Holbrook Pipeline Company
- Holbrook Center Soft Water Association
- Beehive Water Association
- Town of Cheraw
- South Side Water Association
- East End Water Association
- City of La Junta
- Town of Swink
- Bent's Fort Water Company
- Homestead Improvement Association

Package 3

- City of Las Animas
- McClave Water Association
- Hasty Water Company
- May Valley Water Association
- Town of Wiley
- City of Lamar
- Town of Eads

- AVC participants split into three packages for state funding purposes
- Design & construction paced to keep ahead of Trunk Line construction
- Goal: Funding sources arranged to minimize impact on participants



Design is being completed for spur and delivery lines in Package 1, and will total about \$4.5 million and is being funded by the Enterprise (\$2 million) and the Colorado Water Conservation Board grant (\$2.5 million). The Colorado Water Resources and Power Development Authority voted on January 29, 2026, to approve \$45 million in construction for the Package 1 lines, which includes \$17.85 million from the State Drinking Water Revolving Fund and \$27.15 million from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (also called the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law). Funding will be accessed as construction progresses.



AVC designers, operators move project forward



Luke James (left), operator for Avondale, Boone, Manzanola and Rocky Ford, reviews Arkansas Valley Conduit design details with Greg Sekera and Anthony Kaiser of Kennedy Jenks Engineering, while Hunter Willits, Trevor Singleton and Robert Banham of the Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District AVC team observe on April 29, 2026. The joint meetings ironed out details of where pipelines would run, where delivery points are located and what pressures to expect, as well as water resources details such as sources of water supply, blending ratios and other treatment concerns.



Darrell Herman (right in first photo) explains the operations of the Hilltop Water Company to members of the AVC Design Team.



AVC ENTERPRISE SUB-PROJECT



The AVC design team met with South Swink Water Company operator Norm Noe and several South Swink Board members at the Cooperative Extension Office in Rocky Ford on April 28, 2026. South Swink has formed an authority and is making upgrades in its water system that will coincide with the arrival of the AVC.

Fowler operator Brent Bitter (center) and Fowler Town Administrator Colton Davis discuss delivery line specifications for the town of Fowler with Southeastern AVC staff members Trevor Singleton and Hunter Willits and Kennedy Jenks design team members Anthony Kaiser and Brad Florentin on May 1, 2026.



Kenny Wilson (left) and Anthony Kaiser look at maps in an attempt to identify pipeline routes and delivery points for several systems. Wilson is the operator for Eureka Water Company, Fayette Water Association, Valley Water Company, Patterson Valley Water Company, Vroman Water Company, Newdale-Grand Valley Water Company, West Grand Valley Water Company, and Beehive Water Association. Most are in the first round of design and construction under a \$45 million AVC loan-grant program.