



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 Arkansas Valley Conduit Committee of the Southeastern Colorado Water Activity Enterprise holds monthly meetings at District Headquarters, 31717 United Avenue, Pueblo, CO. Check <https://www.secwcd.org/> for Zoom information. Next meeting:

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Meeting will follow the monthly Board meeting which begins at 9:30 a.m.

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

AVC Committee greets new year

A lot can happen in three months.

In “water time,” that might seem like just a small drop, but for the Arkansas Valley Conduit it has been a momentous period with some ups, some downs and a whole bunch of maybe.

So, when the AVC Committee met on January 23, it was time to nail down exactly where we’re at, following the national elections, a change of federal Administration and new challenges and opportunities for a pipeline that finally got off and running after 60 years.

The big topic of the meeting was federal funding.

In early January, Reclamation Commissioner made a special trip to Pueblo with the big news that the AVC had received \$250 million in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funds on top of the \$340 million in previous federal funding.

But a federal funding freeze shortly after the Inauguration cast doubt on all BIL money, as well as other federal funding. Three weeks later, it appeared the BIL money is still in place, but the watch continues.

“We need to be clear that the money is protected,” said Christine Arbogast, lobbyist for the District.

The District will meet with Reclamation in the last week of February for an update the AVC Project schedule. The planning meetings are an opportunity to coordinate the District’s Enterprise Sub-Project with the Reclamation Sub-Project, and have been occurring on a regular basis since 2020.

The other federal activity is legislation to allow for a longer AVC Repayment period, remove or reduce interest and make miscellaneous revenues the sole repayment source for the federal portion of the AVC project. The 2024 legislation, sponsored by Senators Michael Bennet and John Hickenlooper and Representative Lauren Boebert, was part of a larger package in a water bill that stalled. Ms. Arbogast reported that new legislation identical to the 2024 bill is being introduced by Rep. Boebert in the House, joined by newly elected Representative Jeff Hurd. It will be re-introduced in the Senate as well.



Christine Arbogast

See more AVC Committee News on Page 2



Enterprise AVC Sub-Project: Delivery line design

New contracts will be needed for design of the AVC spur and delivery lines after work was halted in June 2024 because of concerns about the updated cost estimates and federal schedule for completion of the trunk line, Executive Director Leann Noga told the AVC Committee.

Engineering Manager Gordon Dillon explained that a new scope of work will be developed after the Principals Meeting with Reclamation in February.

Mrs. Noga explained that the Enterprise AVC Project is not put behind because of the pause in design, because details are still being discussed about how to

use State Clean Water Revolving Funds (SRF) to build the spurs and delivery lines. Design will be necessary in order to apply for those funds, however.

Mr. Dillon updated the Committee on funding for PFAS remediation, which could be available for spur and delivery lines as well as for improvements within individual water systems.

A work plan is being developed to begin design on the spur and delivery lines to Crowley County and Fowler, which can be reached with current funding. The details will be developed following the Principals Meeting.

Reclamation AVC Sub-Project: Contract update

Gordon Dillon reported that Boone Reach 1 and Boone Reach 2 are on-schedule, but the contract for the Injection Site is 6-8 months behind schedule because of internal problems faced by the contractor. He will continue to monitor the situation.

Three contracts are being prepared by Reclamation:

- ◆ Crowley Reach 1, a 5-mile segment past Boone, which should go out for bid in May, and be awarded in September 2025.

- ◆ A Major Crossings Contract that will proceed from west to east will be released sometime this year.
- ◆ Final design will be made by Reclamation to Regulating Tank 2 north of La Junta, but a contract for final design from that point to Lamar will be issued.

Participant meetings will resume in 2025

Participant meetings will resume in as the District is reorganizing its engineering staff because of recent changes.

Gordon Dillon has assumed the position of Engineering Manager, and a new Project Engineer and Water Resources Engineer will be hired in the next couple of months.

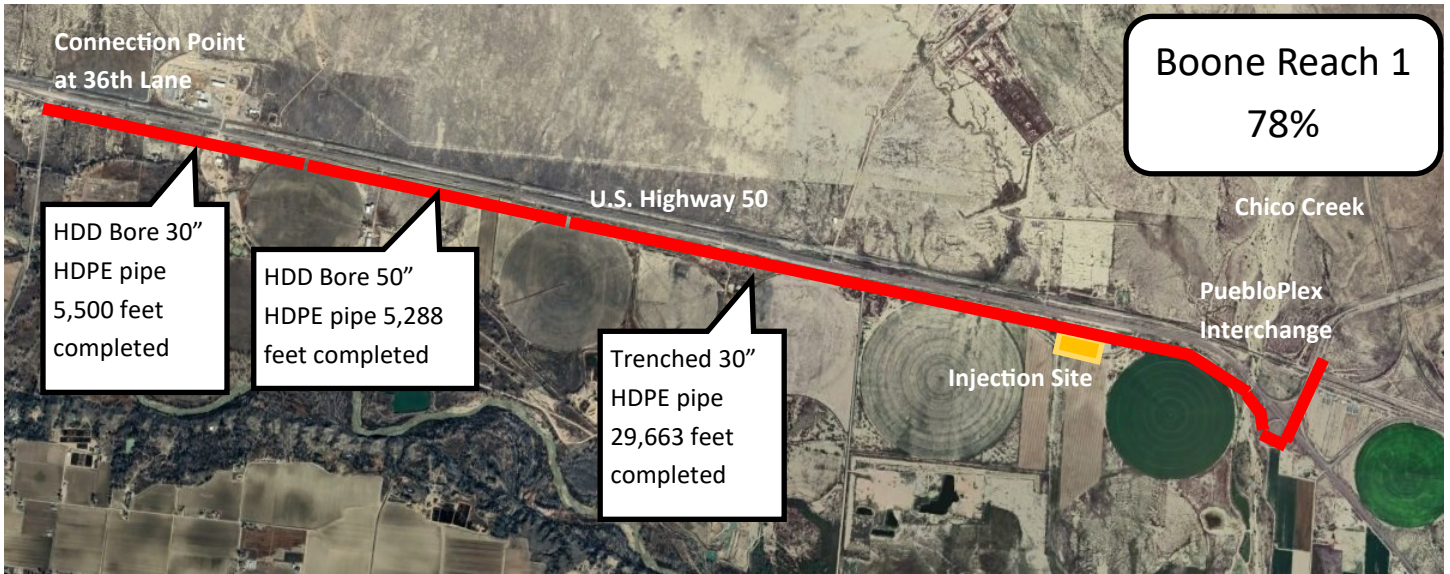
Individual participant meetings on technical and water resources issues began in 2024, and follow-up meetings are being planned. The District will also meet with larger groups of participants as more AVC details emerge.



Gordon Dillon tracks the AVC Project.



Federal AVC Construction Details



Boone Reach 1

The second leg of the horizontal directional drilling (HDD) is complete. A total of 29,633 feet (5.6 miles) of trenched and HDD

installed 30-inch pipe is in place. Crossings at 46th Lane and the PuebloPlex interchange are complete. Work has slowed in recent weeks due to the weather.



Boone Reach 2

As of January 2025, Pate Construction has laid 23,000 linear feet of 30-inch PVC pipe in along Colorado Highway 96 and is starting to decommission some dewatering wells. The Colorado Department of Transportation has approved a full road closure on Highway 96 until the summer of 2025 as work continues.

Injection Site

Thalle Construction Company is on site and has set up of-fices. Stripping of the site has started.

Design

A contract for design from Reg Tank 2 to Lamar is being prepared.

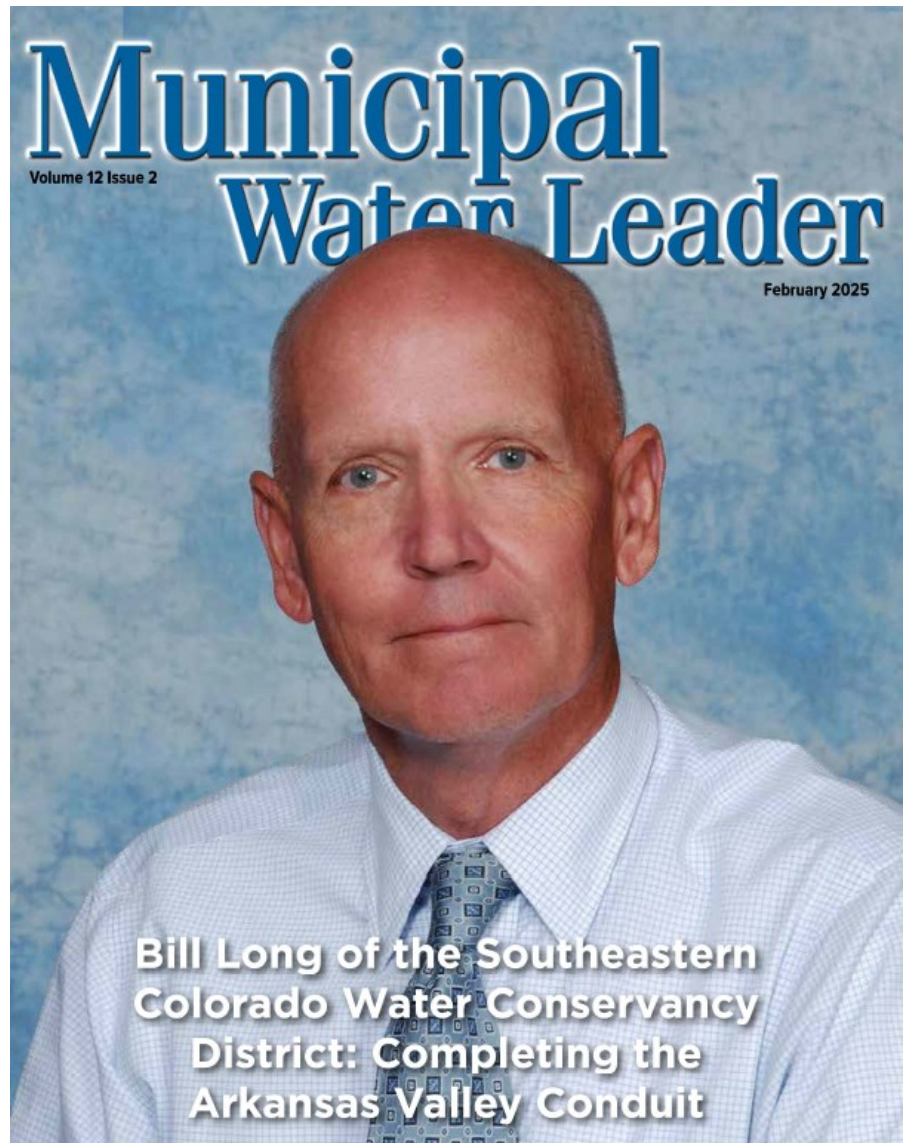


Bill Long featured in trade publication

Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District Board President Bill Long was featured in the February 2025 issue of Municipal Water Leader, with an article talking about the historic importance and current progress of the Arkansas Valley Conduit.

The article is reprinted on pages 5-8 in this month's newsletter by permission of the magazine and can be found online at the following link:

<https://municipalwaterleader.com>

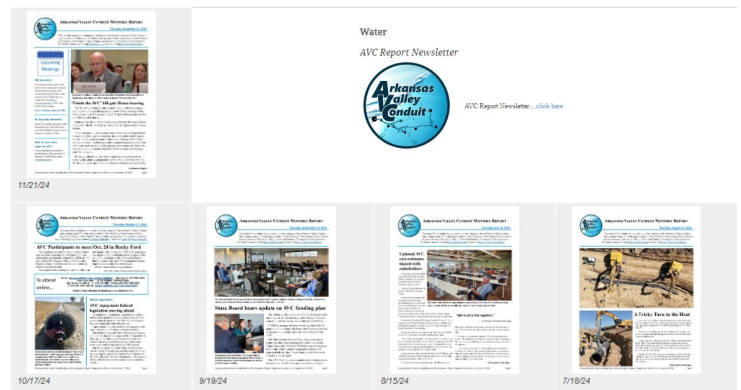


Read past newsletters

For Past issues of the AVC Report go to:

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

Arkansas Valley Conduit Monthly Reports



Bill Long of the Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District: Completing the Arkansas Valley Conduit



Bill Long, center, surrounded by staff and fellow board members, celebrates the ceremonial kickoff of the AVC on April 28, 2023.

The *Fryingpan-Arkansas (Fry-Ark) Project* brings Colorado River water through tunnels under the Continental Divide to benefit users in southeastern Colorado. While most of its infrastructure was complete by 1990, there is still one element to be finished: the *Arkansas Valley Conduit (AVC)*, which will bring high-quality water to users who currently deal with groundwater and surface water contaminated by unhealthy levels of radionuclides, selenium, and sulfates. In this interview, we speak with Bill Long, a local business leader and the president of the Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District (SECWCD), about progress on this bold engineering project, which aims to help secure the future of the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains.

Municipal Water Leader: Please tell us about your background and how you came to be in your current position.

Bill Long: I've lived pretty much my entire life in the lower Arkansas Valley. I was a business owner in the lower valley: I owned and operated a bus business for 25 years, built

a Dairy Queen that we operated for 25 years, and then invested in real estate.

The Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District (SECWCD) was formed to sponsor the Fry-Ark Project, which is still its primary purpose. Not long after the project was finished, an entity outside the district and the Arkansas River basin wanted to use our project facilities to purchase and then move agricultural water, drying up prime irrigated farmland. That created a controversy. At that time, the SECWCD's 15-member board consisted of agricultural producers, water rights owners, and municipal water systems. To meet calls for reform, a judge who appointed the board members began looking for others to represent the general interests of resident taxpayers. I was appointed in 2002 as the Bent County representative to the SECWCD and elected president in 2006. That's how I became involved with the SECWCD and water issues in our region.

Municipal Water Leader: Please tell us more about the SECWCD and the Fry-Ark Project.

Bill Long: In the 1930s, water supply was needed for agriculture. There were also drinking water quality problems in the lower valley. It wasn't until 1955, though, that folks began in earnest to develop the Fry-Ark Project. The project was intended to deliver water from the west slope of the Rocky Mountains to the east slope through a transmountain pipe. In January 1955, folks from the east slope began selling gold pans—\$5 for a smaller pan, or \$100 for a larger pan—to raise funds to send people to Washington, DC, to lobby for the project.

In 1958, the SECWCD was formed. In 1962, the Fryingpan-Arkansas Bill was passed by Congress. President Kennedy signed it and visited Pueblo, Colorado, that same year. We have a great video of that day, which we continue to show off.

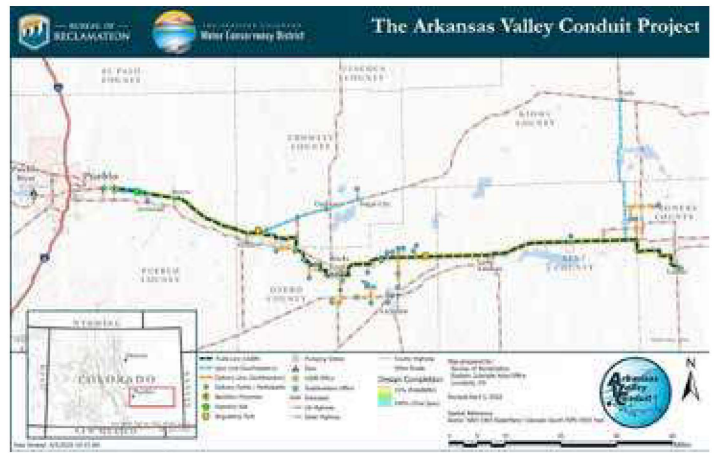
In 1964, construction began with the Ruedi Reservoir, a compensatory water supply and storage project located on the west slope intended to satisfy folks on the west slope, from which we were taking water. Additional tunnels to serve the diversion system were built, as was Pueblo Reservoir, our primary storage site.

Two existing reservoirs, Turquoise Reservoir and Twin Lakes Reservoir, were expanded to take care of the new and additional water supply. Construction continued until 1990, when the fish hatchery was completed.

As of 1990, the only part of the project that remained incomplete was the AVC. We have had no opposition from any quarter, so the only real challenge was funding. There always seems to be a battle with water issues, even if you have the best of intentions, but we have been fortunate in that regard.

Right now, the 20-year average for annual imports from the west slope is 60,000 acre-feet. That water is provided to both municipal and agricultural interests throughout the district. The project provides 159,000 acre-feet for municipal storage. There is also agricultural storage in the Pueblo Reservoir. Another 70,000 acre-feet in the reservoir is set aside for winter water storage, and there is excess capacity storage for native Arkansas River water. Nonproject water can also be stored in the project facility, which provides great value to the district for both agriculture and municipalities.

The benefits of the Fry-Ark Project include the project water, seasonal water storage, and a backup supply. In addition, the project provides recreational opportunities. The Arkansas River is one of the most rafted in the United States, there is more than one gold medal fishery along the Arkansas River, and Pueblo Reservoir is the most visited state park in Colorado. Those are all results of the Fry-Ark Project. Another component of the Fry-Ark Project is the Mount Elbert hydro plant, which can produce up to 200 megawatts of electrical power. The dam at Pueblo Reservoir also provides important flood control and benefits fish and wildlife in the river. Ruedi Reservoir offers flood control and recreational opportunities for the west slope folks. Overall, it's a big project that provides multiple benefits for SECWCD and the entire region.



A map of the AVC.

Municipal Water Leader: Why is the AVC needed?

Bill Long: Arkansas River water and local well water were never known for tasting good, but there wasn't much understanding of health risks in the 1930s. Radionuclides weren't being tested back then. Groundwater generally has the most radionuclides, but you can get those in river water as well. For many years, there wasn't any rush to act or think about remedial steps, as the negative effects on human health were not recognized. There are other constituents of concern too, such as selenium and sulfates. Sulfates are not something you want to drink daily. Only in recent times have the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), and others realized that we needed to do something different.

It's extremely challenging to treat the water we have available. It's expensive, supply is limited, and we're still not currently meeting the safe drinking water standard. Our conclusion is that the primary water source for people in the lower Arkansas Valley needs to be of much higher quality than what is available from underground wells and the river.

In the 1930s, the population of Bent County, where I live, was around 10,000. We're at 5,000 right now. If good water is not available at a reasonable cost, it will be virtually impossible for this region to grow and prosper. Few of the original SECWCD board members were alive when the Fry-Ark Project was completed, but they were thinking about the future.

In the lower Arkansas Valley, starting in Pueblo County and continuing down through Otero, Crowley, and Prowess Counties, we have 39 participants in the AVC project. Eighteen of those participants are under CDPHE enforcement orders for not meeting drinking water standards. More than 18 would be under enforcement orders, except that at least 2 municipalities have reverse osmosis (RO) units. However, RO creates new problems that are more challenging than meeting the drinking water standard. With RO, the unwanted and unacceptable constituents in the water become waste and then



Workers from WCA Construction LLC install a section of AVC pipeline near the U.S. 50–Colorado 96 interchange near Pueblo, Colorado.

get returned to the river, a practice that will at some point be discontinued. The drinking water standard allows 50 parts per billion (ppb) of selenium in your drinking water. An RO plant takes that out. The allowed amount in a wastewater discharge is 4.6 ppb. Without changing the primary source of your water, it's virtually impossible to meet both safe drinking water standards and wastewater discharge standards.

Right now, all water systems in the Lower Arkansas Valley use Fry–Ark Project water as augmentation for their wells, which means the water is allowed to flow down the river to replace groundwater that is pumped. However, this is the least efficient way to utilize project water and does not address any of the existing problems. It guarantees losses. Moreover, if we just release project water into the river, its quality diminishes greatly as it flows down the river. Because of climate change and losses in the Arkansas River, which are at times as high as 20–30 percent, it is critical to have a modern delivery system such as the AVC. We believe that it's important to conserve and maximize the use of this precious, high-quality project water. Delivering clean project water through the AVC is more efficient than using it to replace groundwater.

Municipal Water Leader: Who are the participants in the AVC?

Bill Long: AVC participants include 23 small water companies—some private, some nonprofit. These are typically rural water companies that may have as few as 10 taps or as many as 60 or 70. The project also serves

16 larger towns and cities. Those governmental entities will probably consume 80–90 percent of the water provided.

Municipal Water Leader: Please tell us about progress on the AVC.

Bill Long: The AVC project was originally intended to start at Pueblo Reservoir. The plan was to physically build a pipeline around the city of Pueblo, which would take about 10 years. Based on 4- or 5-year-old numbers, just that piece of the AVC would have cost \$180 million. Instead, we formed a partnership with Pueblo Board of Water Works that would allow us to tie into its system, shortening the construction period by 10 years and saving a large portion of that \$180 million.

We made a connection near Pueblo Memorial Airport, so that's where the actual conduit starts. Pueblo Water will take our water, run it through its treatment system, and deliver it into a 30-inch line on the east side of Pueblo. From the connection point, it will go 122 miles eastward through the Arkansas Valley to Lamar, Colorado.

That's the Bureau of Reclamation's portion of the project. Beyond that, there are spurs and delivery lines off the main trunk that the SECWCD is responsible for building. There are 88 miles of delivery lines going to our 39 participants. Those lines vary in size depending on the participant's needs. We have a 35 percent repayment obligation to Reclamation; building the spurs and delivery lines meets a portion of that 35 percent.

Municipal Water Leader: What partnerships has the district forged to make the conduit?

Bill Long: The partnership with Pueblo Water is the most important.

We also have a fiscal partnership with Otero County. In Colorado, there are state statutes that dictate how funds can be collected and expended. In this case, Otero County has more flexibility than the SECWCD, and most of the AVC participants are in Otero County. The Otero County commissioners agreed to serve as fiscal agents for the project. They are able to receive and expend some funds that we could not. If we had lacked someone willing to be the fiscal agent, that alone could have stopped the project.

We are working with the Colorado Water Conservation Board and the Colorado Water Resources and Power Development Authority to help us fund the spurs and delivery lines. The conservation board has provided \$30 million in grants and \$90 million in loans for this purpose, and we are in discussion with the authority on ways to make these funds go further.

CDPHE has been patient, helping us resolve the problems associated with water quality in the lower valley, which are extremely challenging.

The SECWCD has had a productive relationship with Reclamation since 1962. That partnership has almost always been very good. We have much appreciated Reclamation's commitment and creative approach to solving the problems we face. The bureau has been a true and trusted partner, especially in regard to the construction of the AVC. Since 2020, Reclamation has provided us \$71 million in annual appropriations for the project, as well as \$250 million in infrastructure funds, for a total of \$321 million. Brent Esplin, the director of Reclamation's Upper Colorado Region, and Jeffrey Rieker, the area manager at its Eastern Colorado Area Office, have been very helpful and creative. Commissioner Touton of Reclamation has likewise been extremely supportive and committed to making this happen. Without those three people, I don't think we'd be moving forward. We appreciate their commitment to southeastern Colorado and their dedication to completing the AVC, the last component of the Fry-Ark Project.

Municipal Water Leader: Is there anything you would like to add?

Bill Long: The Colorado delegation in both the House and the Senate have always been very supportive, especially United States Senators Bennett and Hickenlooper and Representative Boebert. We look forward to working with the delegation in 2025, including incoming Congressman Jeff Hurd.

Our 15-member district board represents rural areas as well as big metropolitan areas, such as Colorado Springs and, to an extent, Pueblo. The entire board has been supportive and has worked with staff to make the project a reality as well, and I'm grateful for that.

We had tough times in 2002 and 2003. We were very divided, not over the AVC but over other issues. Having a



Pueblo Dam and Reservoir, which were constructed for the Fry-Ark Project.

team that has the same vision—including Reclamation, the Colorado congressional delegation, our staff, and our board members—is what has made this a reality.

Municipal Water Leader: Would you tell us about your vision for the future?

Bill Long: In my opinion, in the United States today, we often don't plan for or think about the well-being of future generations as much as we should. Too often, instead of considering the common good, we selfishly look at what is best for our own interests. Those who worked to develop the Fry-Ark Project and served on the SECWCD board in the 1950s and 1960s had a thoughtful and considered view of their obligations to society and to future generations. My hope is that we at the SECWCD will continue that tradition and always look toward the future and the well-being of the generations that will follow.

The Fry-Ark Project provided benefits that weren't even envisioned in 1958 or 1962. We were thinking then only about water to drink and to use for agriculture. We ended up with the most visited state park, gold medal fisheries, and a river that is more rafted than any other in the country.

I'm not good at predictions, and I'm not currently aware of any specific shovel-ready projects that would begin tomorrow if only we had clean water. However, I'm certain that this project allows us opportunities that did not exist prior to the delivery of clean water. I am big on the idea that we always have to consider the potential needs of future generations in all our plans. M



Bill Long is the president of the board of the Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District. He can be reached at blong7372@gmail.com.