

Testimony of Norman Noe
Manager and operator of the South Swink Water Company, Swink, Colorado

Hearing on H.R. 317 (Salazar): To authorize the construction of the Arkansas Valley Conduit in the State of Colorado and for other purposes (Arkansas Valley Conduit Act)

Before the Subcommittee on Water and Power
U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources
March 13, 2008

[Madame Chair] My name is Norman Noe, the Manager and Operator of the South Swink Water Company near Swink, Colorado, and I am testifying today in support of the goals embodied in H.R. 317 (Salazar): To authorize the construction of the Arkansas Valley Conduit in the State of Colorado, and for other purposes (Arkansas Valley Conduit Act). In particular, I would like to address my comments to the need for the Arkansas Valley Conduit to the challenges of water quality problems faced by Lower Arkansas Valley communities. I would like to thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify today. I also thank Representatives Musgrave and Salazar for their leadership in introducing this legislation and the Subcommittee for holding this hearing today.

The need for the Arkansas Valley Conduit is driven by projected population growth, the economically-disadvantaged nature of the lower Arkansas River valley, and increasingly costly water treatment requirements being experienced by certain water providers in the basin. The increasing cost of water treatment is a result of the poor quality of locally available groundwater and increasingly stringent requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act. The local groundwater available from the Arkansas River alluvium has historically been high in total dissolved solids (TDS), sulfates, and calcium,

and has objectionable concentrations of iron and manganese. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), in their February 2002 report on the status of water quality in Colorado, states:

The Lower Arkansas River in Colorado is the most saline stream of its size in the U.S. The average salinity levels increase from 300 parts per million (ppm) TDS east of Pueblo to over 4,000 ppm near the Kansas state line. The shallow alluvial groundwater along the River has similar salinity.

The results of CDPHE-sponsored sampling of the Lower Arkansas River alluvial aquifer showed that a significant number of domestic water supply wells contained nitrate levels above 10 mg/l (EPA's drinking water standard). Additionally, sixteen (16) water suppliers in the Arkansas River Basin have recently reported measurable concentrations of radionuclides in their water and are under Enforcement Orders and/or out of compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Act. This extremely poor groundwater quality, combined with increasingly stringent quality regulations of the Safe Drinking Water Act, has caused several local water suppliers to invest in expensive water treatment facilities to assure a reliable water supply for their customers. Entities that have invested in reverse osmosis treatment facilities are now meeting the Safe Drinking Water Standards. These same entities now are having the challenge of trying to meet the Federal Discharge Permit requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act... Others are increasingly at risk of being designated out of compliance and are facing Federal sanctions. The risk posed to the economically depressed region's ratepayers by requirements for as many as 10 new treatment facilities with uncertain costs are considered unacceptable. Rather than continuously spending funds for upgraded water treatment facilities and increased operation and maintenance costs, it has been proposed that a pipeline from Pueblo Reservoir could be used to provide higher quality water to users in the Lower Basin. The

water available from Pueblo Reservoir readily satisfies the requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act and is not expected to change significantly in the future. The benefits of the proposed pipeline are that the well-defined costs of constructing and operating a pipeline could replace the continuously increasing and unconstrained costs of water treatment. Additionally, the improved quality of potable water will result in a better quality of life for water users in the basin.

Generally, all drinking water systems in the Lower Arkansas River Basin, from St. Charles Mesa in eastern Pueblo County to Lamar in Prowers County, are concerned with the poor water quality in this region. Many of the water providers do not satisfy, or only marginally satisfy, current drinking water standards. More than 40 water providers in the Lower Arkansas River Basin could benefit from the Arkansas Valley Conduit, if implemented.

All communities must meet the state and federal primary drinking water standards through treatment or source replacement. Less documented, however, is the potential burden placed upon communities by high raw water concentrations of various unregulated water quality constituents such as iron, manganese and hardness. These constituents can cause accelerated infrastructure decay and loss of tax base and economic impacts associated with factories and businesses locating elsewhere.

The health and economic prosperity of the citizens of Colorado's Lower Arkansas River Basin communities depend on a project that improves the quality of water available to its citizens. The Arkansas Valley Conduit is that project. We look forward to working with our Congressional delegation and this Subcommittee to bring this much-needed project to fulfillment.

