



Bend begins water project

By Hillary Borrud • The Bulletin Published Mar 14, 2014 at 12:01AM

Bend officials said Thursday they hope future generations will appreciate the controversial Bridge Creek water project, in the same way they appreciate the first pipeline the city forefathers pushed for in the 1920s.

Ninety years ago, city officials ran into opposition when they wanted to install the first drinking water pipeline from Bridge Creek to Bend, city Councilor Mark Capell said Thursday.

"They took risk and ridicule to do what was best for our city in the long run," Capell said.

City councilors and other officials gathered at the west end of Skyliners Road to sign a section of the new water pipeline that will soon be installed, in a ceremonial kickoff for the \$24 million Bridge Creek water project.

The contractor, M.A. Mortenson Construction, has been preparing to begin construction since mid-February. Meanwhile, the project is still in litigation. Central Oregon LandWatch and WaterWatch of Oregon filed a federal lawsuit in November against the U.S. Forest Service, which issued a permit for the project. A federal judge has not reached a decision on the lawsuit. This means the city can install only the section of pipeline along the road; the city cannot build the remainder of the pipeline, or install new intake equipment that will allow the city to regulate the amount of water it takes, until the lawsuit is resolved.

Assistant City Manager Jon Skidmore said in light of opposition to the water project city officials learned they need to put in more effort to educate the community about why they believe infrastructure projects are necessary.

"Too often, we like to fix things without everyone understanding what the problem is," Skidmore said.

Capell agreed the city learned from the experience. "The citizen input has helped in refining the project," Capell said.

Mayor Jim Clinton and city Councilors Sally Russell and Doug Knight did not attend the ceremony. The three city councilors were on the losing end of a 4-3 vote on a motion in early 2013 to proceed with the water pipeline and new intake equipment project. Clinton, Knight and Russell did not return calls for comment by deadline Thursday.

A handful of protesters showed up for the event and stood quietly near the pipe, with signs that read "Let's listen to the voice of the land before we speak for it" and "Save the fish!" Protester Allie Morgan said there is no permanent limit on how much water the city can take from the creek, so the project has the potential to reduce the amount of water in the creek and change the habitat for fish.

Patrick Griffiths, Bend's water resource manager, said there are limits on the amount of water the city can take from the creek. The city diverts water from springs on Tumalo Creek, down into Bridge Creek where the Bend diversion facility is located.

"The city has agreed to limits diversion under the (U.S. Forest Service) special use permit to 18.2 (cubic feet per second), and that's a binding permit requirement," Griffiths said. If city officials want to take more water in the future, they would have to go through a new federal environmental review process. Griffiths said the city water diversion is also limited by its water rights.

"There are no new water rights available on Tumalo Creek ...," Griffiths said. "Our water rights are limited and the ability to transfer or purchase or get additional water rights is probably nonexistent at this point."

Project Manager Heidi Lansdowne said the contractor has already cut and removed some of the pavement on the south side of Skyliners Road, where crews will dig trenches to install pipe. On Thursday, sections of steel pipe coated with cement mortar were lined up alongside the road, ready to be placed underground. Lansdowne said she expects it will take up to 11 months to install the pipeline. After the contractor finishes installing the pipeline, crews will patch the edge of the road. Deschutes County will begin reconstructing Skyliners Road in spring 2015, a project that will widen the road by 10 feet to add bike lanes.

Bill Robie, government affairs director for the Central Oregon Association of Realtors, attended the ceremony and said the pipeline project is important to the future of the city, particularly to ensure Bend has adequate infrastructure to support the expansion of businesses.

"This is long overdue," Robie said. "This infrastructure, whether water, sewer or roads, is critical to serve our growing population."

— Reporter: 541-617-7829, hborrud@bendbulletin.com



Andy Tullis / The Bulletin City officials and others signed their names on a ceremonial first section of pipe, during the Bend water project pipeline groundbreaking.



Andy Tullis / The Bulletin Amy Short, 10, bottom, and Kathy Schulz, who both live near Tumalo Creek at the end of Skyliners Road, sign the ceremonial first section of pipe, during the Bend water pipeline groundbreaking.



Andy Tullis / The Bulletin Protester Allie Morgan holds a sign during the Bend water project pipeline groundbreaking, off Skyliners Road west of Bend Thursday morning .



Andy Tullis / The Bulletin Salem residents Lorne Urban, left, and Rick Boedigheimer, both employees of Emery & Sons Construction, check the surface level while compacting gravel during staging for the Bend water pipeline project off Skyliners Road west of Bend Thursday morning.

