

# THE MOUNTAIN MAIL

*Editorial -- Published July 30, 2010*

## **EIS notes mitigation**

The environmental impact statement for "Over the River" has been released. Anyone wishing to comment must do so by the end of August to be considered in the Bureau of Land Management's decision of record.

The Mail endorsed the project years ago. There's nothing in the four volumes just released that changes our position. If anything, details in the EIS confirm our support for OTR.

Yes, traffic will certainly be heavier through the two or three week viewing period. But the EIS notes a number of possible steps which would be taken to mitigate the additional flow expected.

These include barriers blocking turns, increased patrols to enforce no-stopping stipulations and possibly closing recreation areas through the canyon in the area, among a number of others.

Private security staff members, staging fire and emergency response equipment at key points in the area and the purchase of the latest in radio equipment to be used through the exposition will enhance public safety.

While fender-benders are expected given the number of vehicles anticipated, the seriousness of accidents will likely be reduced because of slower speeds. Excess speed is often a factor in most accidents in the canyon. Wrecks or collisions at 60 mph are one thing; head-ons at 25 mph are something else again.

As noted in the EIS, most viewing areas will be in the least populated areas of the Arkansas River canyon. Only 1.1 miles of fabric would be suspended between the Chaffee-Fremont county line at mile 225 to mile 253 just west of Texas Creek, a distance of 28 miles. This section is where most canyon residents reside, in the communities of Swissvale, Howard, Coaldale, Cotopaxi and Texas Creek.

As proposed, the balance of the project's 4.8 miles where most displays would be located come from just downriver of Texas Creek on east to Parkdale.

While traffic from Texas Creek on west to Salida would be affected, this section would feature the fewest number of fabric suspensions with the expected result of reduced traffic congestion.

Details in the EIS point out that during construction, impact to traffic flows on U.S. 50 would be minimized by using the railroad side of the river for much of the staging work required. The project has obtained permission from the Union Pacific to use the railroad as needed during construction.

Traffic will be slower, certainly, but they are not reason enough to kill the project, given "Over the River's" potential benefits. Look for more on this aspect of the project in this space next week.

- MJB

# THE MOUNTAIN MAIL

*Editorial -- Published December 12, 2008*

## **‘Over the River’ comments due**

Monday is the deadline for comment about the “Over the River” project proposed by Christo and Jean-Claude for sections of the Arkansas River east of Salida.

The Bureau of Land Management is seeking comments in conjunction with an environmental impact statement which would determine under which conditions the agency would authorize a permit for the project.

As we’ve said in this space in the past, we see “Over the River” as a positive for the valley, a rare opportunity to call attention to the river and the entire region.

Potential damage to the ecosystem of the river would be minimal, if any. The Arkansas is flanked by U.S. 50, a major highway that receives significant daily traffic, and by Union Pacific Railroad tracks. Yet, wildlife from bighorn sheep to bald eagles to deer are hardly put off by the man-made facilities or by their use.

It’s difficult to see just how the wildlife could possibly be harmed by construction of anchors and guy wires over a few miles of river when the animals have lived and even thrived with, or in spite of, man’s work through the decades.

For wildlife that’s lived with the development along the river for more than a century, the “Over the River” project will be a minor irritation if any irritation at all.

Yes, it will bring attention to the river and to the valley. But the actual inconvenience of the art work will be limited to a couple of weeks of actual display with only minor issues relating to construction. The artists will have to address all issues, from construction work details to how emergency vehicle traffic will be managed.

“Over the River” would have a positive impact on the region and we encourage Bureau of Land Management officials to proceed with the project.

Anyone wishing to comment about “Over the River” should write to Field Manager, Royal Gorge Field Office, Bureau of Land Management, 3028 E. Main St., Canon City, CO 81212.