

Over the River offers far-reaching benefits

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By **DOUG SHANE, MAGGIE DIVELBISS and BILL DVORAK**

As residents of Southern Colorado and representatives of the business, arts and rafting communities, we are very excited that the Upper Arkansas River Valley has been chosen by artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude as the location for their next work of art.

Known as Over the River, this project has the potential to positively affect every sector of our region - from economic development and tourism to recreation and culture.

We want to express our collective support of Christo and Jeanne-Claude and point out a few of the reasons why we feel Over The River will be one of the greatest events ever to take place in Southern Colorado.

First there are the obvious economic benefits. A recent study conducted by BBC Research & Consulting indicated that Over The River may generate a projected \$195 million in additional spending within Colorado. Hosting this artwork will put our area on the map and give a huge boost to the local economies - both in the Arkansas River Valley and throughout the state.

But that's just the beginning. Even more important is the lasting legacy that Over The River would leave. The exhibition period lasts for only two weeks, but people are likely to come back to our area for years to see the one-time site of this remarkable work of art. Perhaps we could even create a visitor center in the valley that would show people how the project was created. Over The River truly has the potential to have a positive impact for decades to come. Then there are the artistic benefits. Over The River will be a beautiful temporary work of art. The artists plan to suspend about 6 miles of coarsely-woven, silvery fabric above the Arkansas at eight sites between Canon City and Salida. More than that, however, there is no denying that Over The River will draw attention to all of the unique cultural amenities of Southern Colorado. This really could boost our prominence in the arts scene and help to introduce thousands to our own artistic offerings, such as the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center and the Sangre de Cristo Arts and Conference Center in Pueblo.

We believe that Christo and Jeanne-Claude care very deeply about the potential impacts that Over

The River may cause. The artists already have completed a 2,000-page analysis on Over The River. They have gone so far as to request an Environmental Impact Statement, which will be kicked off in the near future by the Bureau of Land Management.

An Environmental Impact Statement will study in great detail all of the potential impacts in areas such as traffic and wildlife and will look at ways to help lessen or eliminate those impacts. The artists have proven with their previous projects that they truly are committed to having as little impact as possible on the daily lives of locals. We believe that Over The River will be no exception.

Over The River likely is to be one of the most amazing experiences of our lifetime, and our region stands to reap significant benefits as a result of hosting this artwork. We strongly encourage the residents of Southern Colorado to get behind Christo and Jeanne-Claude and lend them your support as they work to make this exciting project a reality.

Doug Shane is executive director of the Canon City Chamber of Commerce; Maggie Divelbiss is executive director of the Sangre de Cristo Arts and Conference Center; and Bill Dvorak is president of Dvorak Expeditions.