

## Major Pipeline Among Ideas For Aiding Arid West

**Notebook:** Keystone

**Created:** 1/30/2013 12:37 PM

**URL:** <http://m.weatherbua.com/weather-news/weather-reports/14367?cid=27>

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### Major Pipeline Among Ideas For Aiding Arid West

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By Jim Salter, The Associated Press  
December 10, 2012

ST. LOUIS - Even as drought-stricken Midwestern states squabble over diminishing water supplies in the region, a new federal-state study raises the idea of constructing a 670-mile pipeline to divert water from one of the Mississippi's major tributaries to help seven arid states in the West.

For two years, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming have been considering ways to provide more water for the growing populations in the West. A plan scheduled for release later this month will include a proposal for a pipeline to ship water west from the Missouri River, along with a number of less ambitious options.

The pipeline proposal, which would cost an estimated \$11.2 billion and take 30 years to complete, is expected to intensify the debate over how to ease one growing region's shortages without harming the interests of others.

Bureau of Reclamation spokesman Dan DuBray said the pipeline idea is in the very early stages, a long way from reality.

"The idea of constructing conveyances to move water resources between other basins and the Colorado has been raised before and was once again submitted as an idea in this process," DuBray said. He said the proposal will be evaluated, but that the agency doesn't view it as

"among the most practical or cost-effective proposals submitted."

Any plan for diverting significant amounts of water from the Missouri would encounter opposition from some in the Midwest given the drought and competition for water resources.

The Missouri River flows from North Dakota to Missouri, and provides drinking water, recreation, hydropower and irrigation in six states. The drought has left river levels so low that shipping companies are warning that barge traffic downstream on the Mississippi could come to a standstill by the end of the year. States on the Mississippi are calling for the release of more Missouri River water into the Mississippi, but northern states are objecting.

Some conservation organizations argue that future water demand in the West should be met with conservation and policies that increased water reuse. Those measures are the focus of the more modest options in the plan. Constructing a major pipeline is "absurd," said Jason Bane of the Boulder, Colo.-based Western Resource Advocates.

But some western interests are pressing for more aggressive steps.

Patricia Mulroy, general manager of the Southern Nevada Water Authority, said the nation must keep an open mind to a variety of ideas for meeting water needs, including pipelines that could provide a dual benefit: Removing excess water in flood-prone areas like the Midwest during high water periods, and transporting it to areas like the West that have an urgent need for water.

"Maybe it's time for us to look at marrying the concepts of flood control and drought protection," Mulroy said. "We've seen in the middle portion of the country some devastating flooding going on. Should we be talking about preserving those floodwaters somehow and not putting New Orleans at risk and some of the other communities at risk year after year?"

The Missouri River pipeline plan notes that water wouldn't be diverted during droughts. But Bane said that if both the West and Midwest are in drought, water battles would almost certainly ensue.

The pipeline proposal calls for a large treatment plant near Leavenworth, Kan. The pipeline would run roughly adjacent to Interstate 70, with the flow moved in part by a series of high-capacity pumping stations. It would supply roughly 1.2 million households in the western states.

The western states now depend heavily on the Colorado River. In announcing the water demand study early last year, the Bureau of Reclamation noted that the natural water supply of the Colorado River basin varies from year to year, with localized shortages now routine. The study said demand is rising as the western population grows, but that supply may decline due to climate change.

Ideas about moving water from one place to another have been broached before, and more are being proposed.

California Gov. Jerry Brown and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar in July announced plans for a massive twin-tunnel system to carry water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta to provide water for cities and farmland.

In May, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for the second time denied a permit for a

500-mile pipeline to carry water from the Green River in Wyoming to Colorado's Front Range.

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Story image: In this file photo, water levels at the Colorado River's Horseshoe Bend begin to rise along the beaches just hours after the Glen Canyon Dam jet tubes began releasing water, in Page, Ariz. Drought, climate change and an increasing population in the West are pushing the Colorado River basin toward deep trouble in the coming decades, scientists say. AP Photo/Matt York

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