

CITY/METRO

The Pueblo Chieftain 136th Year... and still on the job!

Thursday March 11, 2004

Sections:

- Home
- City/Metro
- National
- Sports
- Business
- Life
- Editorial
- Classifieds
- Obituaries
- Crossword
- Comics
- Games
- Weather
- Archives
- Daily Photos
- Daily Headlines
- My Chieftain

Search: ?

Recent Issues:

- Monday
- Tuesday
- Wednesday
- Thursday
- Friday
- Saturday
- Sunday

View Date: ?

Classifieds:

- Sell My Car
- Announcements
- Automotive
- Employment
- Farm & Ranch
- Finance
- Merchandise
- Real Estate
- Service Directory
- Place an Ad

ADVERTISEMENT



"There's nothing wrong with giving the customer a bargain"

-Jake Jabs

ADVERTISEMENT

Lower Ark River deemed impaired



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/CHRIS McLEAN

The Arkansas river below the Pueblo waste-water treatment plant is considered an impaired waterway. The problem isn't discharges, it is nature and irrigation working in combination, say experts.

By JASON LANDERS
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

DENVER - Water quality in the lower Arkansas River Basin has been ranked among the worst of the worst for waterways in Colorado chiefly due to elevated selenium levels.

The dubious impairment listing isn't entirely negative. It can translate into increased federal funding to improve conditions and more extensive scrutiny of water projects that involve federal permits, according to testimony and comments made during a two-day rule-making hearing before the state Water Quality Control Commission.

A divided commission voted Wednesday to place 26 segments of the lower Arkansas River and its tributaries on

- Curr
- I
- Ho
- Ro

Your pr
Tan
ame
se
C



E-Mail Notifier
Services:
Contact Us
Subscribe
Delivery Rates
Advertising
Advertising Rates
About this site
Special Inserts:
Active Years
Summerfest
Winterfest
Guidebook
Generation x-tra
Romance Special
Wedding Directory
Activities:
Spring Run Off
State Fair
Pueblo Zoo
About Pueblo:
Business Directory
City Guide
Pueblowest View
Pueblo Chamber
Youth:
Newspapers in Education
Headbone Zone
Classroom Chieftain
School District 60
School District 70
Pueblo Library District

the list of impaired streams, known as the 303(d) list. Impaired status will be conferred on much of the river from above Pueblo Reservoir and Fountain Creek to the Kansas state line.

The commission also voted to add 22 segments from the Gunnison Basin, five from the lower Colorado Basin, 13 from the Rio Grande Basin, four from the San Juan Basin, 32 from the South Platte Basin, and 12 from the upper Colorado Basin. The commission is scheduled to enter a final vote on the list next week.

Newly approved standards for selenium contributed to nearly a third of the total statewide listings, and the majority of those in the selenium-rich Arkansas basin.

After years of haggling with the federal Environmental Protection Agency for a more permissive selenium standard, the state recently adopted the federal standard of 4.6 parts selenium per billion parts water (ppb) as being protective of aquatic life.

Levels in the mainstem of the Arkansas frequently range between 10 and 18 ppb, according to US Geological Survey. Levels in the river's tributaries are even higher, with one measurement hitting a high mark of 1,000 ppb. Samples of groundwater near Pueblo have showed concentrations as high as 7,000 ppb.

Selenium is a naturally occurring chemical element found in marine shale that is beneficial to animal life in small doses. In large amounts, it can prove toxic and has been blamed for fish kills and bird deformities.

Average levels in the mainstem of the Arkansas far exceed those found elsewhere in the state, though most of the state has elevated concentrations. Levels in the Arkansas consistently range between two and four times higher than those found in the Colorado River Basin, another river where selenium is a major concern.

Experts say inefficient irrigation and stormwater runoff can exacerbate the problem.

At least one federal report of the heavily irrigated Arkansas



Stc
Dow
-25.7
Nasdaq
-18.4
S&P 500
-4.24
Last L

S
Clic
yo
Col

Ac
Beg
the v
yo

Cl
Start
an
yol

T
One
The
v

Basin shows levels from tissue samples of many birds exceed those known to kill mallard embryos in laboratory tests. To date, there has been no study to assess what effect the elevated levels are having on aquatic- or wild-life.

Issues involving selenium are rapidly climbing in prominence, suggests one leading state regulator.

"It is certainly one of the more significant pollutants of concern," said Mark Pifher, of the water quality division of the State Health Department. "Given it's state-wide occurrence, it's rising to the top."

Not everyone agreed with the listing. The city of Pueblo unsuccessfully argued that a segment of the Arkansas the city discharges into should be placed on the list for further monitoring, not impairment. In the end, a majority of commissioners voted that anything above the standard, at least in the case of selenium, must be deemed impaired.

"The list is simply of water bodies that have an impairment because they exceed water quality standards," Pifher said.

Pueblo and Colorado Springs were able to work out a compromise with the Water Quality Division that will keep regulators from setting total maximum daily loads (TMDLs) for selenium on portions of the Arkansas River and Fountain Creek. The concession will lead to more study of the problem and possible site specific standards in the future, Pifher said.

"We are pleased that the commission agreed that our plan . . . was sufficient," said assistant city attorney Tom Florczak, who argued dischargers shouldn't be punished for a naturally occurring and irrigation-related problem.

TMDLs could be set for other impaired portions of the basin, though Pifher said there would be a 13 year time frame to do so. He said the standards could change again before then or site-specific standards could be developed from findings of an ongoing statewide selenium study.

Steve Glazer, an environmental advocate representing High Country Citizens Alliance, argued that an impairment listing for Cold Creek will free federal money to improve conditions.

"If you are a listed segment, it prioritizes EPA pass through

funding availability," Glazer said. "More money is made available to restore those segments listed as impaired than if it weren't listed."

It was a position that several commissioners reiterated throughout the hearings.

EPA administered grants are helping some Wyoming farmers on the North Platte River switch from furrow irrigation to more efficient systems that are seen as a way of combatting selenium levels. Previous interviews with researchers in the Arkansas basin have suggested that better irrigation efficiency here could dramatically improve selenium concentrations, as well.

According to several witnesses who argued against an impairment listing in other basins, the listings will add another level of scrutiny for water projects. A vocal opponent of many of the proposed listings, Commissioner Brice Lee Jr. also complained that it will be very difficult getting federal permits for projects that would involve impaired stream segments.

Commissioner Dr. Chris Wiant, who supported most of the listings, said the listings will focus the spotlight and resources on selenium impaired streams across the state. "If it doesn't go on the list," he argued for a case involving the Arkansas River, "it never gets resolved."

Arguing for the proposed selenium listings, Commissioner Brian Nazarenius said, "Some of us feel the selenium issue needs to be pushed."

The commission didn't bite at an argument by Trout Unlimited that a stretch of the Dolores River should be placed on the list. Fish populations there have dropped in recent years by 70 percent, indicating the river is impaired by something.

Melinda Kassen of Trout Unlimited said not making the list means "There is no clean water act funding under 319 (grants) available for this. And it means that there is no acknowledgement that there is a problem."

IMPAIRED RIVER SEGMENTS

Arkansas River Basin impairments and priority

RIVER SEGMENT	PORTION	IMPAIRMENT	PRIORITY
Fountain Creek from Steele Hollow Creek to the Arkansas River	All	Selenium	Low
Monument Creek from National Forest to Fountain Creek	All	Selenium	Low
Monument Lake, Pikeview Reservoir, Prospect Lake, Quail Lake, Willow Springs	Willow Springs Pond	Phosphorus, Cerium	Medium
Arkansas River, Fountain Creek to Colorado Canal headgate	All	Selenium	Low
Arkansas River, Colorado Canal headgate to John Martin Reservoir	All	Selenium	Low
Arkansas			

River, John Martin Reservoir to state line	All	Selenium	Low
Apishapa River, Timpas Creek, Lorencito Canyon	All	Iron (total recoverable), Selenium	Low
Purgatoire River, I-25 to Arkansas River	All	Selenium	Low
Mainstem of Adobe Creek and Gageby Creek	All	Selenium	Low
Rule Creek, Muddy Creek, Caddoa Creek, Clay Creek, Cat Creek	All	Iron (total recoverable), Selenium	Low
Arkansas River, Pueblo Reservoir to Wildhorse Creek	All	Selenium	Low
Arkansas River, Wildhorse Creek to Fountain Creek	All	Selenium	Low
Wildhorse Creek	All	Selenium	Low

St. Charles River and tributaries, source to CF&I diversion	All	Selenium	Low
St. Charles River and tributaries, CF&I diversion to Arkansas River	All	Iron (total recoverable), Selenium	Low
Sixmile Creek	All	Iron (total recoverable), Selenium	Low
Huerfano River from Muddy Creek to the Arkansas	All	Selenium	Low
Cucharas River, source to Walsenburg PWS diversion	All	Fecal coliform	High
Boggs Creek	All	Selenium, Zinc	High
Arkansas River above Lake Fork	All	Cadmium, Copper Lead, Zinc	Medium
Arkansas River, Lake Fork to Lake Creek	All	Cadmium, Copper, Zinc	Medium
Arkansas River, Lake Creek to Pueblo Reservoir	Lake Creek to Badger Creek	Zinc	Medium

Arkansas River tributaries from source to Brown's Creek	Halfmoon Creek	Zinc	High
Evans Gulch from source to Arkansas River	All	Zinc	Medium
South Fork Lake Creek, source to Lake Creek	Sayers Gulch	Copper	High
Tributaries to the Arkansas River from Pueblo Reservoir to Colorado canal headgate	Teller Reservoir	Mercury	High

Next

Back to top

 **Email**

 **Print**

 **Save**

 **Popular**

ADVERTISEMENT



ADVERTISEMENT