



Preserving Civilizations

By SCOTT DAVID JOHNSON

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ST. GEORGE - Records of two civilizations could be damaged by a reservoir at Ft. Pearce, which would be authorized by the Washington County Growth and Conservation Act.

The land bill would transfer rights to land surrounding Ft. Pearce Wash to the Washington County Water Conservancy District.

Chaitna Sinha, field attorney for the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, said the district plans to build a reservoir that could leave invaluable resources under water.

Sandstone walls looming above the wash exhibit 19th-century graffiti from early pioneers, as well as American Indian petroglyphs and fossilized plants.

"These panels like this, they're really sacred to us," said Glenn Rogers, chairman of the Shivwits Band of the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah. "It's just like going into a temple when we view these things."

Ronald Thompson, general manager of the Water Conservancy District, confirmed plans of a reservoir, but stressed that a detailed proposal has not been made.

"We think there should be a reservoir there - more flood control than perhaps storage," Thompson said. "Exactly where it will be, I don't know."

Thompson said the reservoir could receive water from the Lake Powell pipeline, in addition to reducing flood risks in Apple Valley and Bloomington Hills.

"This reservoir has actually been discussed for 15 years, or longer," he said. "In our files, in state files, there has always been a proposal for something out on Ft. Pearce."

The land is currently under federal control.

James Crisp, of the Bureau of Land Management, said he supports a reservoir for flood control, but is concerned about the location.

"Right in the middle of this half-mile stretch you have bedrock that comes to the surface on both sides of the creek in a fashion that if you were going to build a dam or a reservoir, that's the place you'd build it," he said.

But that stretch contains "some very unique and unusual resources in it," he said, citing

sensitive species as well as cultural and historical artifacts.

The BLM has suggested a site farther upstream that would be less destructive but more expensive.

Thompson said the district is open to other sites.

"I'm willing to commit that we'll look at both alternatives and go with what makes sense at the time, taking into account those resources," he said.

The district would have to do an environmental assessment before building a reservoir.

But Sinha said the language of the land bill could tie the public's hands, mandating a right of way to the district and muddying any future legal challenge.

"You see a lot of instances in this land bill where what should be communitywide decisions become decisions that are made by a very selective number of people without a way for the public to be meaningfully involved," she said.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Jim Matheson and Sen. Bill Bennett, both of Utah, will come before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on Nov. 16.

For video footage related to this story, please go to www.thespectrum.com/news/extras/wash.html.