

# Study says water project won't harm Canada

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A project to move Missouri River water to northwestern North Dakota cities poses little risk to Canadian waters under any treatment option, preliminary findings of a court-ordered environmental study show.

The report also says the threat of invasive water species transferring between the Missouri River and Hudson Bay basins exists even without the Northwest Area Water Supply project, which has been under construction since 2002. "Although some people may consider elimination of interbasin water transfers a viable risk avoidance option, there are multiple non-Project pathways through which invasive species may be transferred," the report says.

Tristan Landry, spokesman for the Canadian Embassy in Washington, said Friday that officials were still analyzing the report and would provide comments to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation later.

Michelle Klose, the NAWS project manager for North Dakota's Water Commission, said state officials have not taken a formal position on the draft report but view it as being positive. "They're making it clear there is low risk for (the transfer of) invasive species" through NAWS, Klose said of the report. "That's actually pretty positive for all the alternatives."

The study, ordered by U.S. District Judge Rosemary Collyer, is the result of an October 2002 lawsuit filed in Washington by the Canadian province of Manitoba, which fears the potential transfer of harmful material into its waters through NAWS. Only construction unrelated to treatment can continue with the judge's permission.

Sixty-eight miles of pipeline has been installed between Lake Sakakawea and Minot, and between Minot and Berthold - less than half of what ultimately will be installed, Klose said. There will be no timeline for finishing construction until the treatment issue is resolved, she said.

The study, which is aimed at identifying the best treatment method for the river water, considers four alternatives. Their estimated construction costs range from \$8.1 million to \$90 million, with annual operating and maintenance costs ranging from \$232,000 to \$2.1 million.

While the more expensive options rank slightly better in reducing risk, "the risk analysis ... demonstrated that, with effective treatment, the risk of transferring invasive species through the Project would be low to very low for all of the alternatives," the report says.

The treatment option preferred by the Manitoba government, which would include filtering the water, would cost an estimated \$73 million, with operation and maintenance costing about \$1.8 million annually. "The addition of the filtration process ... provides an additional barrier" to invasive species, the report says. The current treatment plan would cost the least, at \$8.1 million. "There's not a lot of incentive on the state side to see that treatment cost increase, if they're saying there's a low risk for all of the alternatives," Klose said.

Federal officials ultimately will choose one of the four alternatives. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is taking public comments that will go into drafting the final report later this year. Public hearings are scheduled Feb. 4 in Bismarck, Feb. 5 in Minot and Feb. 7 in New Town.

Klose said the federal government would be responsible for the entire cost of whatever treatment method is chosen. "There is no guarantee or promise" of funding for the more expensive options, she said. If a more costly alternative is picked, some worry it might delay completion of NAWS, she said.