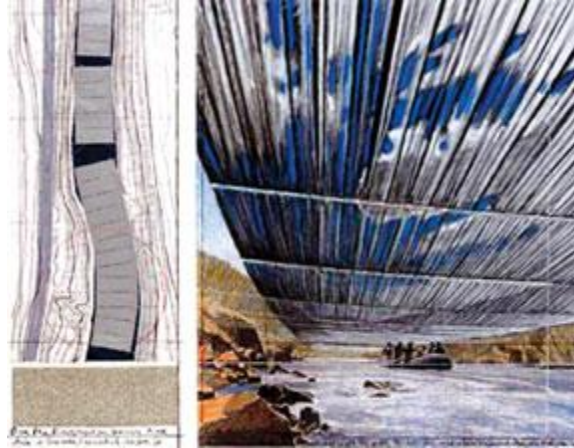


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Details emerge on Arkansas River curtain project



COURTESY PHOTO/WOLFGANG VOLZ -- This 2007 photo by Wolfgang Volz showcases a Christo collage complete with hand-drawn topographic map, fabric and twine which represents the proposed Over the River project.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude's proposed Over the River creation will consist of 5.9 miles of fabric panels between Salida and Canon City.

**By TRACY HARMON
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN**

CANON CITY - Details about Christo and Jeanne-Claude's proposed Over the River project are coming into focus as the staging of the unusual artwork could be less than four years off.

Members of the artists' team - project engineer Vince Davenport, project manager Jonita Davenport and attorney Lori Potter - met with members of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's Front Range Resource Advisory Council Tuesday in Canon City. The 15-member council represents diverse public land interests and users and advises BLM managers on land management programs and issues.

Jonita Davenport said Tuesday that Over the River will consist of 5.9 miles of fabric panels suspended in eight sections above the Arkansas River between Salida and Canon City. The longest section, about 2.25 miles, with some interruptions, would be located between Spikebuck and Parkdale just west of Canon City.

If approved by the BLM and other permitting agencies, the project would likely be viewed during a two-week period sometime between July 15 and Aug. 15 of 2012. Vince Davenport detailed the cost

of the project which he said would be in the neighborhood of \$50 million, all of which is paid for by the sale of Christo's preparatory drawings and artworks related to Over the River.

"After it is done is the only time we really know what a project will cost," Vince Davenport said. "I'll be better able to give an estimate when I get the bid on the drilling costs because the drilling of the anchors - between 8,000 and 10,000 of them - will probably be half the project cost. "The cost of the fabric, which will come from a small mill in Germany, will probably be the smallest cost," he said.

The Over the River team estimates up to 380,000 people could visit the valley to view the project with another 90,000 coming just before and another 90,000 coming just after the two-week viewing period in 2012.

Estimated economic impact to the state is \$195.5 million: \$78.3 million generated in Denver, \$55.3 million generated in Colorado Springs and a \$15.9 million impact in the Arkansas River Valley.

The team expects an independent firm will be hired sometime this fall to conduct a full-scale Environmental Impact Statement on the proposed project. Christo's team will pay for the study while the BLM will oversee that company's work, Potter said.

Potter said there will be "plenty of additional public hearings" held to collect public input, but main concerns to be studied will be traffic, safety and wildlife impacts.

"Not everybody is going to like it. We understand that," Jonita Davenport said.

"But once we address wildlife, traffic and safety issues in the EIS, by then we are hoping people will at least be understanding of the process," she said.

Construction work (drilling of anchors and stringing cables) is expected to last 24 to 27 months, leaving down time for winter weather and summer months when work will not be done on the U.S. 50 side of the river. When work is done on the highway side, a one-lane closure will cause delays between 3 minutes to 5 minutes, Vince Davenport said.

"The fabric (described as silvery, translucent, very tough, porous and non-flammable) will then be hooked onto the cables and all bunched up until we crank it across with a winch which will take about three weeks from start to finish. Christo and Jeanne-Claude's projects normally blossom in one day but that won't be the case for this one," he explained.

With a new anchoring system in mind, Vince Davenport said he did a live test in Broomfield three weeks ago using various anchors drilled between 25 feet and 30 feet into the ground.

"The anchors will be capable of holding 90,000 pounds of tension or compression and having done three years of checking wind loads in the valley, it passed the test with flying colors," Vince Davenport said.

An initial anchoring system, using 8,000-pound concrete anchors, proved to be too difficult and the new anchors are more aesthetically pleasing to Christo, he said.

He said another project that used more anchors than the Over the River proposal was the umbrellas project in Japan and California which required about 12,000 anchors.

Members of the council had numerous questions for the team and environmental representatives were most concerned about the alteration of the land by the anchoring system. Vince Davenport said that whatever soil was removed from the drilling would be "put back in and compacted and the plants restored."

BLM Royal Gorge Field Office Manager Roy Masinton said he may try to have the opponents of the project come in and make a presentation to the council.

"That way we will give credence to both sides of the argument," he said.

ON THE NET

For more information:

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