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Studies to ramp up in spring for Peabody Energy's planned Trout Creek Reservoir near Steamboat

By **Tom Ross**

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Steamboat Springs — Peabody Energy's application for a preliminary permit to build the 392-acre Trout Creek Reservoir 15 miles southwest of Steamboat Springs is being considered by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, but many steps remain in the lengthy approval process, including some key studies that are scheduled to begin as soon as May.

The reservoir, at an estimated cost of \$16 million, is expected to store about 12,000 acre-feet of water, with rights to store 15,000 acre-feet. In comparison, Fish Creek Reservoir, which stores most of Steamboat's drinking water, holds 4,167 acre-feet, and Stagecoach Reservoir stores 36,460 acre-feet.

Peabody officials said the reservoir would give the company a reliable long-term source of water for washing the coal it mines in Routt County, including at the new Sage Creek Mine and someday for anticipated new mines farther to the west.

A new round of studies of issues related to the reservoir could begin in earnest in early spring, according to the Peabody executive working on the project.

Peabody Director of Real Estate Development Brian Yansen said the study plan, which will be submitted to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission by Jan. 18, is the result of suggestions made in the fall by stakeholders in the reservoir, including local government agencies and conservation groups.

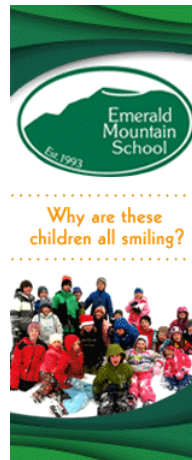
"The study plan is really analysis of what studies we're going to do going forward," Yansen said Wednesday. "We've decided what studies we intend to do, and this is our path going forward. If (the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission) agrees, we'll hit the ground running April 14."

Yansen already has prepared a draft Trout Creek Reservoir schematic that shows that by May 1 and 2, studies looking at potential impacts on migratory birds and raptors, ground water, a recreation management plan and a fisheries management plan could get under way with many more to follow.

Matt Rice, director of Colorado conservation for American Rivers attended the October scoping session. On Wednesday, he said he filed a request for a study of the impact the dam would have on cutting off the transport of sediment and gravels that is a natural process that takes place in healthy rivers and streams.

"I don't believe the applicant has done enough to look at that," he said.

Rice also is urging Peabody to agree to release water from different levels of the new dam to help ensure... in the Fed...



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additional opportunities to make recommendations on the study plan for Trout Creek Reservoir.

Yansen expects the approval process to stretch throughout three years.

More immediately, people have until Feb. 3 to [comment on the preliminary plan](#). Click on the orange eComment button, and include your name and contact information with your comments.

Documents filed regarding the plan can be found [here](#). Click on "Docket Search" and enter the docket number P-14446.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission is the agency administering the permit application because Peabody has chosen to build a small hydroelectric plant in association with the dam. It would be about one-third the size of the hydro plant at Stagecoach Reservoir and produce enough electricity to power 125 homes, according to Yansen. He told the Routt County Board of Commissioners in October that Peabody added the hydropower component to the dam to acknowledge Colorado's alternative energy initiative.

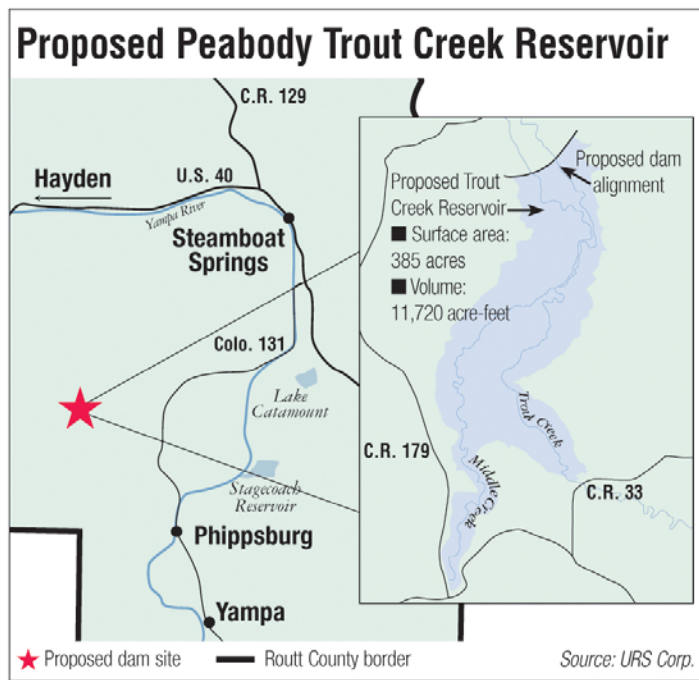
A public notice filed by Federal Energy Regulatory Commission points out that the preliminary permit is essentially a placeholder, giving Peabody priority to file a more significant license application in the future. Shana Murray, the project coordinator for the federal commission, said Peabody is required to file a more detailed study plan for the reservoir Jan. 18.

In addition to Trout Creek, the new reservoir would capture water from tributary Middle Creek.

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