

The Pueblo Chieftain

Seeking to brighten budgets

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DENVER — Libraries, senior citizen centers and other community facilities in Las Animas, Otero, Bent, Prowers and Baca counties are the focus of a proposed project to reduce energy use.

The \$125,000 proposal is to convert existing lighting in those facilities to LED lighting. Light-emitting diode lights require less energy and last longer than traditional light bulbs.

The proposal was developed by the Arkansas River Power Authority and by Lamar Light and Power to implement part of a settlement agreement with an environmental group. The key part of the agreement requires the power authority and Lamar Light to keep closed a coal-burning generating plant in Lamar that would emit pollutants if the plant operated.

WildEarth Guardians, the environmental group, sued the power authority and Lamar Light in 2009 and 2011, alleging that aspects of the plant violated the Clean Air Act. Lamar Light is the plant operator on behalf of the authority.

A federal judge in Denver ruled a year ago that the plant violated the Clean Air Act for four years by not meeting a requirement for regulating emissions of hazardous pollutants.

The settlement agreement also required the authority and Lamar Light to pay \$100,000 to WildEarth Guardians and \$225,000 to the University of Denver's Student Law Office for fees and costs they incurred litigating the lawsuits. DU law school students served as attorneys in the cases against the plant.

The plant has been closed for most of the time since November 2011 because it was unable to operate without exceeding the state's limits on the level of pollutants it was allowed to emit.

The plant developed serious problems from using coal when it was converted several years earlier from using natural gas to generate electricity.

The lighting proposal was submitted last week to a U.S. District Court judge. A judge's approval is required because the proposed project would be part of the agreement, in October, that settled the lawsuits.

If approved, the replacement lighting fixtures are estimated to reduce electrical usage by 60 percent or more. Specific facilities to receive the LED lighting are to be determined later and the project is to be completed in late 2015.