

On March 9th. 1911, a terrible fire broke out in Douglas. With a strong North wind blowing and low temperatures, the fire spread and the water needed to fight the many blazing houses and structures ran low or maybe even ran out, possibly draining the Douglas reservoir. The assumption is that the City of Douglas got together and made the decision to provide a better and more constant supply of water for the City of Douglas to use for firefighting.

At some point in time the Treadwell gold mining company came up with the idea of using salt water from the ocean for mill processing water, because the salt water from the ocean was more certain and unlimited in availability, whereas rain water and snow melt was seasonal and unreliable at best.

This knowledge was not lost on the people of Douglas, so soon after the 1911 fire the decision was made to tap into the ocean and use the salt water as the main back up for firefighting. A plan was made to place a concrete iron doored pumphouse at 820 Front Street in Douglas. A pipe line approximately 10 inches in diameter was laid and buried all the way out onto the tide flats and buried to some depth below low tide elevation to insure the constant access to the salt water of the ocean.

A plumbing system was installed from the output side of the two-cylinder piston pump, piping the salt water from the pump through the 12-inch concrete walls of the CITY FIRE PUMP building out to the street side of the of the wall, just about 6 feet below the iron doors. A whole nest of piping and valves were located there and were used to switch the flow of salt water into the city's potable water lines when needed for fighting fires. After fighting a fire, the potable water supply pipe lines could be flushed out with chlorinated water to be sure the drinking water was safe again.

When the engine and pump became unusable, about 1947 or 1948 I think I remember, the iron door being open and some man working on the engine and maybe even starting the engine. I have been told that the starting mechanism used a shotgun cartridge to fire off the old engine. It may even be a good idea to reinstall such a good and positive water supply for firefighting in Douglas again.

In the late 1960's a 12-inch wooden flume was built to take water from Lawson Creek and position it to allow water to flow into the drainage of Bear Creek where the Douglas Dam is located. This allowed water flow into the Douglas Dam on Bear Creek. During the winter months this flume was buried under several feet of snow that acted as insulation allowing the water to flow down to the Dam area topping off the reservoir.