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Anti-Glade group touts alternative plan

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Northern Colorado's growing cities can get the water they need at less cost and without the environmental impacts of building Glade Reservoir, according to a group of Glade opponents.

The Save the Poudre Coalition ran out an alternative to the massive reservoir, which would be built north of Ted's Place as part of the proposed Northern Integrated Supply Project, at a meeting Wednesday at the Lincoln Center attended by more than 100 people.

The group's proposal — the Healthy Rivers Alternative — calls for storing water in alluvial aquifers and gravel pits rather than new reservoirs.

It also calls for increased water conservation by municipalities participating in NISP to reduce the demand for water.

More water could be made available to the cities through agreements with large blocs of farmers, who would keep water off their fields on a rotating basis and sell it to cities to meet their needs, according to the proposal.

Save the Poudre's proposal should be considered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as it weighs comments on the draft Environmental Impact Statement on NISP, said spokesman Gary Wockner.

The draft EIS, which looks at four alternatives, including not building the project, does not meet the requirements of the federal National Environmental Policy Act, he said, and should be completely redone.

"It is full of errors, glaring omissions and false information," he said. "It does not adequately address the full-range of alternatives."

An analysis of the draft EIS by a group of scientists and economists found many problems, Wockner said. The environmental impacts of the project, including water quality, were inadequately researched, he said.

NISP would be built by the Northern Water Conservancy District and draw on the Poudre River to fill Glade Reservoir. It would yield 40,000 acre feet of water a year. An acre foot is enough water to meet the needs of one or two urban families.

The draft EIS overestimates the anticipated growth of the 15 municipalities and water districts that would participate in NISP and pay its bills by more than 100,000 people, he said. Save the Poudre's population estimates were based on updated information from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Colorado state demographer.

Fewer people means less demand for water. The draft EIS sets the participant's demand for water at 115,000 acre feet by 2050. Save the Poudre estimates the number to be closer to 72,000 acre feet.

"We don't think they need near as much water as they say they do," Wockner said.

The group's alternative would keep more water in the river and cost participants hundreds of millions of dollars less than NISP as it is described in the draft EIS.

In a telephone interview, Northern Water Conservancy District spokesman Brian Werner said ideas such as storing water in aquifers and rotational fallowing on farms were studied by the Corps as part of the EIS process.

The concepts were eliminated because of practical or technical problems, such as the lack of aquifers in the Poudre River basin.

"I would be surprised if they came up with something that hasn't been looked at before," he said.
