

Army Corps takes water district cash to keep Glade Reservoir environmental review schedule

Written by Bobby Magill

May. 27

coloradoan.com

What is NISP?

The \$500 million Northern Integrated Supply Project will siphon water off the Poudre River during high spring flows and store the water in the proposed Glade Reservoir. The new lake would be built between two hogback ridges north of Ted's Place directly atop the U.S. Highway 287 right-of-way.

NISP would supply water to cities and farmers in Larimer, Weld, Morgan and Boulder counties. Fifteen cities and water districts are involved in NISP, including the towns of Windsor and Severance and the Fort Collins-Loveland Water District, among others.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is currently conducting a supplemental environmental review of NISP. A draft of the review was expected late this year, but has been delayed until early 2014. A decision on final approval of the project was expected to be made next year, but the final date is now undetermined.

Keeping the Glade Reservoir environmental review on schedule is worth \$139,254.95 to Northern Water.

That's how much the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District is giving the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to pay for a project manager who will help complete the supplemental environmental review for the Northern Integrated Supply Project, or NISP.

A draft of the review, part of the years-long permitting process for NISP, had been expected to be released to the public sometime this year, but now the Army Corps is saying it'll be sometime in early 2014, said Northern Water spokesman Brian Werner.

Northern Water and the Army Corps signed an agreement on May 17 for the Army Corps to take Northern Water's money to pay for a part-time project manager for two years. The money is coming from all the cities and water and irrigation districts that are participating in NISP.

"What we're hearing is they (the Army Corps) don't have the funds," Werner said. "If we don't do this, they probably won't be on their schedule."

But the Army Corps' won't say if or by how much the money will actually speed up the review process or keep it on schedule.

"I can't give you a for-instance on that," Scott Franklin, chief of the Army Corps' Denver regulatory office, said Tuesday.

He said the Denver office does not have budgetary constraints, but by accepting the money, the agency is trying to be "proactive" at a time when other Army Corps offices' budgets are being hit harder by the federal sequester, he said.

In the Army Corps' May 23 announcement that it had decided to take the money, the agency said it would take numerous steps to prevent the permitting process from being biased toward the approval of NISP.

Northern Water's money will not pay for any work done by people high up in the Army Corps' chain of command who will be making final decisions on NISP, the announcement said.

Franklin said the Army Corps will be unbiased in its decision-making process regardless who pays for the NISP permitting process.

Environmentalists opposing NISP said the money creates the appearance that the Army Corps will have a conflict of interest when deciding whether to give final approval to Glade Reservoir and NISP.

“Choosing to accept this politically tainted money to ‘expedite’ NISP/Glade Reservoir permitting only expedites the controversy surrounding this river-destroying project,” said Gary Wockner, director of Save the Poudre. “If they do it fast, they better do it good, because we are watching very, very closely.”

Follow reporter Bobby Magill at twitter.com/bobbymagill.