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Big changes for the Poudre River

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Reader Submitted*

If you ask anyone native to Fort Collins, they could tell you a bit about the proposed damming of the nearby Cache la Poudre River. They would inform you it has its ups and down and that this overhanging idea of the dam has been around for what seems to be forever. Naturally there are two sides of the argument, and it is time to clear up the misconceptions. Careful research and an interview with the Public Affairs Associate Brian Werner of the Northern Integrated Supply Project (NISP) along with other sources gave me some insight as to what a dam would mean for the Northern Front Range.

The Northern Front Range, that is, the area between Denver and Fort Collins is growing exponentially; in fact, Brian Werner states that "The population of this area has doubled in the past three years." This is no surprise either, considering that the Fort Collins area has something for anybody: the Rocky Mountains, golf courses, bike trails, the proximity to Denver, nightlife, and the subject of discussion, the Cache la Poudre River. With the arrival of a more and more urban population, extensive home building, and thus more materials, money, and in this case, water, is needed. Without a bigger water source, and a bigger population, Mr. Werner envisions a dried up Colorado, much like Southern California. This is where the dam comes in, which has been sought after for the past twenty-two years, with Brian having been part of the project from the get-go. A dam right off of the Poudre Canyon would supply this growing demand for water, an annual 40,000 acre feet of water, with a reservoir (the Glade Reservoir) bigger than that of the famous Horsetooth Reservoir, with possible additions to harvest hydroelectric power in the future.

The bureaucratic process had made receiving permits a nightmare for the NISP, resulting in a constant change of plans, from how the dam is built to where it is to be built. Brian Werner believes that the NISP will be able to get their hands on the permits in the next few years and then an additional 15-20 years will be needed afterward to build the dam. While the dam may seem unhealthy to the environment and possibly the economy, Brian Werner believes the contrary. He believes that the future of Colorado looks much better with the addition of a dam than without it and that most Northern Front Range inhabitants would think the same. Brian realizes that of course there will be a bit of an environmental impact, as with any developmental project, but that they will do their best to reduce their footprint on the surrounding areas. Brian Werner is a strong believer in conservation of resources, science and technology to develop new ways to renew resources, and overall a fan of just keeping the environment pristine.

As to what a dam on the Poudre River would do, both sides are very convincing and both have valid arguments. Brian argues that hikers and fishers will not notice one difference in the Poudre Canyon, although he does admit that fish and wildlife population could be harmed. Albeit this is what the expert says, local opposition has a different view. Experts at Don't Flatline the Poudre say that a dam would create dry spots in the river, be an economic disaster, and hurt wildlife. This source claims that a dam would capture an additional 35% flow of water, with the already 60% diverted, which would make the natural June Rise caused by the glacial run off, just nearly as flat as any of the other months. This negates what Brian Werner says earlier. How else will Brian be countered? According to Ralph Maughan of Ralph Maughan's Wildlife News, a dam on the Poudre River would be a catastrophe. Ralph argues that the economy is on the decline and therefore the housing boom is over, which ends the need for an additional water source. Instead of building a dam, Ralph says, "There needs to be much less investment in housing for the relatively well off and much more in science, technology, environmental protection and remediation etc."

Who's to know what a dam will result in, until it is actually built? We can estimate cause and effect,

cost, and if it will benefit more than hurt, but in the end we will just have to go with our gut. Although experts at the NISP think that the future of Colorado looks better with the dam than without it, the best option is to look into other ways we can provide water and energy without possibly harming our beautiful Cache la Poudre River. With all this in mind, I'll be damned if a dam should be built on the Cache la Poudre. I have enjoyed too many days there as a hiker and climber to see it get harmed. It would also be in Colorado's best interest to limit population growth in sprawling communities, as it will destroy the pristine natural area of the Colorado Front Range. It is the sprawling communities fueled by urban population that created the need for more resources, and usually it is best to solve the problem at the source. In regards to if I am worried about the addition of a dam, I look at the issue as Joshua Zaffos of Rocky Mountain Holla does. He says, "Compromise or no compromise, the future of the Poudre River and NISP is still very undecided."
