

Guest opinion: Boulder County should reject NISP

By Gary Wockner Boulder Daily Camera

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"If the gloves don't fit, you must acquit." Johnny Cochran

Many folks up here in Fort Collins were stunned to read the comment in the Daily Camera last Sunday made by the public works director for the City of Lafayette who said, "The NISP project really fits like a glove."

Let me tell you about the Northern Integrated Supply Project (NISP), a project that would further drain the heart and soul out of Fort Collins.

The Cache la Poudre River is already a seriously impacted river -- due to dams and diversions already in place, 60 percent of the river no longer flows through downtown Fort Collins. Sometimes the river is drained bone dry. If NISP is built, another 40 percent of the river will be drained out, leaving less than 1/4 of the river's natural flow coursing through town, which will not only destroy the aquatic life in the river, it will destroy the river's ecological corridor all the way through Fort Collins. This project would be built to further subsidize and fuel unsustainable sprawl and population growth in Boulder County's towns of Erie, Lafayette, and in the Left Hand Water District north of Boulder.

The Poudre just isn't any river flowing through any town -- it's the heart and soul of our community, flowing practically from one end of town to the other. Like Boulder, we have a bikepath running all the way through Fort Collins along the Poudre that cost millions of dollars to build. We also have thousands of acres of natural areas and open space alongside the river and the bikepath that have been purchased and preserved to protect not just the flow of the river, but also the flow of nature through our community.

And there's no doubt that NISP is a terrible water project. Here's some facts:

A diverse Fort Collins City Council voted 6-0 to oppose NISP after spending \$750,000 to study its impacts.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said NISP "is not in compliance with the Clean Water Act."

The State of Colorado Water Quality Control Division denied NISP an early water quality certification.

NISP would help force the dry-up of up to 123,000 acres of Colorado farms as communities like Lafayette and Erie continue sprawling over Colorado's farmland.

One of NISP's proposed reservoir sites is on top of fracked oil and gas wells, and several NISP communities are already selling water for fracking.

That's in part why we put together the "Save The Poudre Coalition," which is a unique coalition of 20 regional, statewide, and national environmental groups dedicated to protecting and restoring the Cache la Poudre River. We also formed "Save the Poudre: Poudre Waterkeeper," a new stand-alone nonprofit aligned with Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s Waterkeeper Alliance to specifically protect the Poudre River. And our primary intent is to stop NISP. We will fight as long and as hard as it takes to stop this river destroying -- and community destroying -- project.

We have also created an alternative to NISP so that towns like Erie and Lafayette can meet their water needs without destroying the Poudre River -- we call this alternative the "Healthy Rivers Alternative." It focuses on water conservation, water recycling, better growth management, and water-sharing agreements with farmers, which are all commonsense options as opposed to continuing to destroy rivers, sprawl across the landscape, and dry up farms.

So here's our message to Boulder County's Lafayette, Erie, and the Left Hand Water District: NISP has been in the permitting process for over 7 years, and there's no end in sight to how long it's going to take or how much it's going to cost.

This glove don't fit. You should quit, because we ain't gonna.

Gary Wockner is the Executive Director of Save The Poudre (SaveThePoudre.org).