

Colorado's Poudre Labeled America's Most Endangered River

Denver - Fort Collins, CO (April 17, 2008)—American Rivers, the nation's leading river protection organization, today designated the Cache la Poudre River as one of the "Most Endangered Rivers in America." In response, a rally and press conference was held in Fort Collins this morning to increase awareness about the Poudre's plight and to protest the Northern Integrated Supply Project (NISP)/Glade Reservoir. The project is a water diversion plan that would severely degrade the ecological health of the river, dry up farmland, and threaten the quality of life and economy of the region. "This is a very unfortunate day for Fort Collins and northern Colorado," said Gary Wockner, a member of the Save The Poudre Coalition, who sponsored this morning's event. "What's happening on the Poudre today is 'ground zero' for the next phase of regional water wars. We are standing at a place, and in an issue, of national significance." Today's announcement by American Rivers, designating the most endangered rivers, was based on three criteria: (1) a river's threat level, (2) a major decision in the next year regarding the river, and (3) its regional and national significance. For the Cache la Poudre, the threat is the NISP/Glade Reservoir, a project that will drain even more water out of the already degraded Poudre. The major decision coming this year will be the Environmental Impact Statement by the Army Corps of Engineers regarding the project. Finally, the Cache la Poudre has great significance regionally as a driving force for recreation and business in Fort Collins. The river is also the only "National Wild and Scenic River" in Colorado as designated by an Act of Congress. "Instead of draining our rivers, Colorado should be moving aggressively forward with water conservation and mutually beneficial partnerships with the agricultural community," said Susan LeFever with the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Sierra Club. "If this project goes forward, it will set the stage for more Colorado rivers to make the 'Most Endangered' list for years to come." The NISP/Glade project, a massive dam-and-reservoir project that would include the 177,000 acre-foot Glade Reservoir, is the largest engineering project proposed along Colorado's Front Range in a quarter century. If built, the project would divert about 35% of the water out of the Poudre River as it flows through Fort Collins—and that is in addition to the 60% of water that is already diverted out of the Poudre. It would also wipe out a scenic valley just north of Fort Collins and require the relocation of part of Highway 287 at an enormous cost to ratepayers. The ecological costs are even higher. Besides draining the Poudre to a trickle and threatening a variety of plant and animal species, the NISP/Glade project would severely deplete the already beleaguered "June Rise," the natural increase in stream flows that occurs during snowmelt that is critical to the overall health of the Poudre River ecosystem. "Over the last decade, Fort Collins has received a number of national accolades, so receiving this negative publicity about one of the key elements of our city – the Cache la Poudre River that flows through the heart of our town – tarnishes our image," said Lisa Poppaw, City Councilmember from District 2 in Ft. Collins. "More important than our image, however, is the very real threat to this river. Our downtown economy is increasingly dependent on a healthy river." With its massive size and price tag, the NISP/Glade project also puts at risk downtown Fort Collins businesses and the multi-million dollar investment citizens have made in the public land corridor that runs along the river and through the city. • Fort Collins calls the environment one of its "economic engines," and cultural and recreational resources such as the Downtown River District, Beet Street, and UniverCity Connections all benefit from a healthy river flowing through town. • Tens of millions of dollars have been allocated to natural areas and bike paths along the Poudre River corridor to preserve and enhance recreational, aesthetic, and ecological assets for the citizens of Fort Collins, Larimer County, and Colorado. For farmers, the NISP/Glade project represents an additional challenge as at least 20,000 acres of farmland will have to be cleared, paved over, and converted into residential housing in order to finance the project. On April 30, the Army Corps of Engineers is scheduled to release its Environmental Impact Statement about the Glade Reservoir project and citizens will have a chance to let their voice be heard through a 90-day public comment period. Opportunities include: • Sign the Save The Poudre Petition: <http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/save-the-poudre-river.html> • Contact local government: http://www.savethepoudre.org/write_your_representatives.html "This sad day also brings a chance for clarity and hope," continued Wockner. "The river is not dead yet. Each year, as American Rivers designates the 'Most Endangered Rivers in America,' there are great success stories as dams are stopped and removed and rivers are cleaned up. Citizens can speak out and make a difference and I encourage you to do so." For the complete list of endangered rivers from American Rivers log onto http://www.americanrivers.org/site/PageServer?pagename=AR7_MER2008_pressroom. For more information on Save The Poudre go to http://savethepoudre.org/endangered_river.html. About Save The Poudre Coalition: The Save The Poudre Coalition (www.savethepoudre.org) is committed to positive, balanced solutions for the long-term health of the Poudre River and for the sustainability of our communities. The Coalition believes that what's good for the land, air, water, and wildlife is good for people and good for our economy. Member groups include Poudre Paddlers, Cache la Poudre River Foundation, Friends of the Poudre, Sierra Club Poudre Canyon Group, Fort Collins Audubon Society, Citizen Planners, Wolverine Farm Publishing, American Rivers, Defenders of Wildlife, The Bean Cycle and Matter Bookstore, and the Colorado Environmental Coalition. # # # Contact info: Gary Wockner Save The Poudre Coalition 970-218-8310 garywockner@comcast.net