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Controversy Approaches High-Water Mark

City: Glade could harm Fort Collins' drinking water supply

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The heavy rains and rapid snowmelt that have charged the Cache la Poudre River in the past couple weeks won't affect the debate about Glade Reservoir—not that the issue needed more ammunition.

But the high water will likely be in mind as conservation groups, city representatives and business leaders continue to wonder how much lower it will go if Glade is built.

A coalition of conservation groups formally requested another doubling of the period for public comment about the proposed reservoir, saying the Army Corps of Engineers' Environmental Impact Statement about it is so technical that they need more time to study it. The city of Fort Collins also requested an extension.

“We have a team of people reviewing it. It's really long and really technical, so we need more time,” said Gary Wockner, a Fort Collins conservationist and spokesman for the Save the Poudre Coalition.

The debate is about the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District's Northern Integrated Supply Project, which includes 170,000 acre-feet of water storage at Glade Reservoir, which would be built along the current route of U.S. 287 north of Ted's Place.

When the Army Corps released its EIS in late April, it said the reservoir northwest of Fort Collins would dry up the Poudre through the city by as much as 71 percent. Opponents point to that number and other environmental impacts as reasons not to build Glade. Proponents argue it is needed to shore up water supplies for future population growth and continued agricultural use.

The documents supporting Northern Water's proposal amount to more than 4,000 pages.

Wockner noted other environmentally sensitive projects that have elicited longer comment periods: drilling in the Roan plateau and potential uranium mining northeast of Fort Collins.

Learn More: The Army Corps of Engineers is hosting three public forums next week about the proposed Glade Reservoir project.

« Monday, June 16
Open house at 4 p.m.;
meeting at 6 p.m.
Hilton Fort Collins, 425 W.
Prospect Road

« Tuesday, June 17
6 p.m.
Fort Collins Senior Center,
1200 Raintree Drive, Fort
Collins

« Thursday, June 19
7 p.m.
University of Northern
Colorado University Center,
2045 10th Avenue, Greeley

« Copies of the EIS are available to view at the following locations in Fort Collins:

Colorado State University,
Morgan Library, 501
University Ave.

Fort Collins Regional
Library District, 201
Peterson St.

Fort Collins Regional
Library District-Front Range
Community College-Larimer
Campus, 4616 S. Shields St.

“The potential negative impacts of NISP/Glade on the Poudre River and our economy are easily as bad as those of the Roan drilling or the Nunn uranium mine,” he said in a statement. “It took the Army Corps of Engineers five years and \$6 million to produce this document. The public should get more than 90 days to review it.”

Wockner said in an interview that the EIS’ computer modeling of the river’s flows did not include several years of data from drought years.

“That’s a very big, important issue, so we are going to press them very hard on that,” he said. “What it would significantly change is how much water is available to fill Glade, so that’s one of the things we’re going to ask them about.”

Current high flows would amount to blips in the river’s hydrograph, however, and would not be consequential.

Fort Collins city staff workers are also studying the proposal and have begun examining the fiscal impacts it could have on the city.

According to documents from Tuesday night’s council work session, city staff believes the EIS has several deficiencies, including a lack of information about water temperature changes, information about effects on fish and invertebrates and data to support conclusions about riparian vegetation.

City staff also believes the project would degrade Fort Collins’ drinking water supply because water from Glade would contain more organic carbon.

Since the project would provide water through extra storage and exchanges, some Glade water could reach Horsetooth Reservoir, source of the city’s drinking water.

“(Organic carbon) may degrade both the quality of our drinking water and the clean water needed by local breweries, computer chip manufacturers and many other businesses,” the staff report reads.

What’s more, reduced flows in the Poudre could force the city to install more advanced water treatment systems before city wastewater could be discharged into the river. And finally, the presence of trichloroethylene contamination from a former Atlas missile site near the proposed reservoir could harm the water in Glade, Horsetooth or both, not to mention the Poudre itself.

City Council already approved spending \$760,000 to study the issue, and will discuss it further at a council meeting in July.

The Army Corps is not expected to announce whether it will extend the comment period until after public meetings scheduled for next week.

Editor’s Note:

See FC Now’s special report about Glade Reservoir at www.fortcollinsnow.com by searching “The Great Water War.”

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