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Corps weighs impacts on Poudre River

Analysis focusing on Greeley pipeline, other projects

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Plans to build and operate a 60-inch water pipeline from Bellvue to Greeley are being affected by other projects that would draw water from the Poudre River, including the controversial Glade Reservoir.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which would be responsible for issuing permits for Glade as well as proposed expansions of Halligan and Seaman reservoirs, is weighing the environmental impacts all of the projects could have on the river before allowing construction of the pipeline's remaining segments.

The Corps is analyzing the combined effects of the projects as part of environmental impact statement, or EIS, studies for Glade and the Halligan-Seaman projects, said Chandler Peter, a project manager with the agency.

At issue is how depletion of the river caused by the projects would affect the river's resources, including its fisheries, riparian areas, recreation and morphology, Peter said.

"We need to understand the cumulative effects of these projects and determine what mitigation and operational conditions would be needed to minimize those impacts," he said.

The Corps is attempting to establish a "common technical platform" that describes the river's flows and currents condition in order to understand how its ecology would be affected by additional depletions, he said. That platform would be used in determining how the projects may operate, if they are approved.

Greeley officials said they are working with the Corps to provide the information it needs to issue permits for the pipeline's remaining sections, including a controversial segment through LaPorte.

The city had a study done on how an increased draw on the river allowed by the pipeline would affect the river, said John Kolan, an environmental attorney for Greeley.

The city would acquire additional water rights on the river from local agricultural ditch companies and take in more water at its Bellvue water treatment plant.

The analysis found the increased draw would have minimal impact on the river downstream of the takeout point currently used by the ditch companies.

The study looked at several scenarios for the amount of water the pipe would carry, Kolan said.

The project's overall impact on the river appears "to be pretty small," said Jon Monson, director of water and sewer for Greeley, and should be in line with the Corps' standards.

"There are ways to mitigate the impacts that it would have," Monson said. "We feel good about being able to complete the project."

The Save the Poudre Coalition, which has been leading the fight against Glade Reservoir, has not taken a stance on the pipeline project, spokesman Gary Wockner said.

But it is closely following the Corps' process and raising questions about all of the projects proposed for the river.

"We're happy the Corps decided to look at all of the impacts on the Poudre River very carefully," he said.

Long history

Greeley established a water treatment facility in Bellvue and a pipeline to Greeley in 1907.

The attraction was the high quality of water coming from the Poudre, Monson said. A second pipeline was added in the 1950s.

The plant takes up to a combined 22 million gallons of water a day from the Poudre River and Horsetooth Reservoir. Water is moved from Bellvue through the pipes to Greeley by gravity.

Another pipeline is needed to meet the future demand for water, Greeley officials said.

About half of the new 30-mile pipeline is already in the ground, including a portion under construction this summer across north Fort Collins.

Where it is complete, the new pipeline is connected to Greeley's other pipelines and is carrying water.

The Corps has permitted various segments of pipeline as it has been constructed beginning in 2003. The permitted section scheduled for construction would be College Avenue and Shields Street in Fort Collins following the route of the Union Pacific railroad line.

That section is under design and is expected to be put up for bid in the fall. Its addition would increase the capacity of Greeley's transmission lines by 2.7 million gallons a day to 29.3 million gallons.

But last year, the Corps told Greeley it could not exceed 26.6 million gallons a day until the agency could determine whether the impacts of the increased draw on the river would be minimal after mitigation.

Greeley officials are on the Corps to learn what happens next with the pipeline and how it ties into other projects along the Poudre.

A supplemental draft EIS on Glade Reservoir and the Northern Integrated Supply Project is expected to be released next June. The draft EIS of Halligan-Seaman is expected to be ready late next year.

Construction on the LaPorte segment of the pipeline is scheduled for the winter of 2010-11, Monson said. The entire pipeline project is expected to be done in 2013.

Another delay

In addition to more environmental data on the pipeline, Corps officials said they need information

about its potential impact on historic and natural resources along a route preferred by Greeley around LaPorte.

Construction on the proposed route could disturb tracks and bridges along the old Greeley, Salt Lake and Pacific Railroad line, which is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Three property owners have refused access to crews that would conduct tests needed to determine the final design of the route and whether it would impact historic and natural resources.

The residents said the tests could irreparably harm the very resources they are supposed to be measuring. They want the city to take another route, such as along its existing water lines.

Without access to the properties, information needed by the Corps cannot be obtained, Greeley officials said. The city is seeking a court order through its power of eminent domain to access the properties.

The court process is likely to take two or three months, Monson said.

Greeley could have avoided the need for a Corps permit for the LaPorte segment by pursuing a route that would carry the pipeline beneath the river.

But Monson said that route would have been disruptive to more LaPorte residents and businesses as well as more expensive for the city.

"We would rather spend money on mitigation and helping the river," he said.
