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County raises questions about Glade

BY KEVIN DUGGAN

KevinDuggan @coloradoan.com

The Larimer County commissioners agreed Tuesday to beef-up their formal comments on Glade Reservoir and the Northern Integrated Supply Project but declined to take a stand on the controversial water-storage proposal.

The commissioners' comment to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on a draft Environmental Impact Statement on NISP will include concerns about the potential impact of the project on water quality and wildlife habitat along the Poudre River.

The county's comments also will question the impact NISP would have on agricultural lands as described in the draft EIS, which estimates 69,000 acres of farmland would be lost if the project is not built.

The assumption is entities participating in NISP would buy agricultural water to meet their needs if they don't have the storage capacity Glade Reservoir would provide.

NISP would draw from the Poudre and provide 40,000 acre feet of water a year to the 15 regional municipalities and water districts that would fund the project in cooperation with the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District.

Glade Reservoir would be built north of Ted's Place. When full the reservoir would hold 170,000 acre feet of water. An acre-foot is enough water to meet the annual needs of one or two urban households.

The commissioners chose not to take an "up or down" position on the project as other local governmental entities have done. Last week the Fort Collins City Council unanimously passed a resolution opposing NISP as it is described in the draft EIS.

Commissioner Kathay Rennels said the county should be cautious about taking a stance on a regional water project when it is involved in another.

The county has a financial stake in the proposed Chimney Hollow Reservoir project, which is also going through a federal EIS process, she said. Chimney Hollow would be a 90,000-acre-foot reservoir built west of Carter Lake. The county would manage recreation on the reservoir and the surrounding property.

"I would hate to have us criticized for supporting something when we have taxpayer dollars in it and not supporting something that we don't have taxpayer dollars in," she said.

Commissioner Randy Eubanks, who participated in the commissioners' meeting via telephone from Washington, D.C., said he believes NISP "is not in the best interest of Larimer County" but understands the reason for not yet taking a formal stance on the project.

"It's extremely important that we retain a seat at the table and talk about these issues," Eubanks said.

Feedback on the document from individuals as well as governmental entities and environmental groups are due to the Corps by Saturday.

The county's formal comments include input from various volunteer boards and commissions, including the Environmental Advisory Board and the Open Lands Advisory Board.

Opponents of NISP said the county's comments, while more in depth than originally proposed, did not go far enough.

"Their comments overall are woefully inadequate," said Gina Janett, a former Fort Collins City Council member. "They're just tweaking around the edges. They are not making a finding that this analysis is totally inadequate to determine the impact."
