

Don't kill our river; it's the only one we've got

The Fort Collins Audubon Society's Board of Directors recently voted to oppose the building of Glade Reservoir in northern Larimer County.

After extensive study, FCAS has concluded that Glade Reservoir is the worst threat to the health and ecological integrity of the Cache la Poudre River since the reservoir project was proposed some 20 years ago.

If built, Glade Reservoir will siphon water out of the Poudre near the mouth of the Poudre Canyon, diminishing water flows through LaPorte, Fort Collins and nearby towns by 35 percent to 50 percent. The historic "June rises," which help cleanse the river of sediments and pollutants, will largely disappear. According to the EPA, the Poudre River already has severe water quality problems as it flows through Fort Collins. Reducing water flows will worsen those problems.

The cities of LaPorte, Fort Collins and Greeley have spent tens of millions of dollars to purchase natural areas, parks and conservation easements along the Poudre River and to develop dozens of miles of foot and bike trails. These investments are threatened by the proposed reservoir, as is the quality of life of residents who fish, tube, hike and otherwise recreate along the river.

The Fort Collins Audubon Society has nominated a stretch of the river for consideration as a state Important Bird Area due to its importance for regional bird life. Water flowing through the Poudre River supports hundreds of acres of adjacent wetlands, as well as a mature riparian forest corridor. This key wildlife habitat is also threatened by the proposed reservoir.

The Audubon Society notes that there are fiscally sound alternatives to building Glade for communities that want to secure future water supplies. Chief among these is water conservation. Even just putting in place the main conservation measures currently used in Aurora, a leader in water conservation in Colorado, would save these communities 25 percent to 30 percent of their water use - at a fraction of the cost of Glade. Mutually beneficial water exchange agreements with farmers could supply all of the rest of these communities' water needs for the next 50 years.

In addition to its direct ecological effects on the Poudre River, building this reservoir would actually accelerate population growth and development along the northern Front Range, further degrading the area's environment. This is because small communities buying in to Glade will have to grow rapidly in order to add water ratepayers to pay for the project.

The most cynical aspect of this proposal is that it is being promoted as a way to keep agriculture in business by doing away with the need to buy water from farms. But in order to pay for the reservoir, Glade's subscriber communities will have to pave over tens of thousands of acres of land that are currently in agriculture.

The Fort Collins Audubon Society urges area leaders to work together to find ecologically and economically sound ways to secure area water supplies. It urges the Army Corps of Engineers to reject the Glade Reservoir project as ecologically and economically unsound. Finally, it calls on Fort Collins' City Council to formally oppose this project and to direct city staff to begin exploring all legal options to protect our river.

To learn more about Glade Reservoir and water conservation, go to www.savethepoudre.org.

Phil Cafaro lives in Fort Collins.

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