

Endangered Poudre River lies in best place to live

Mark Easter

"Endangered" is a weighty title, evoking danger, risk and imminent threat to survival. It is also another way of saying, "Here is something really worth saving."

On April 17, the Cache la Poudre River made the list of "Most Endangered Rivers in America." It's a designation that shouldn't make us proud. Frankly, it stinks. But it should, I hope, call us to action to save a river whose fate hangs by the thinnest of threads.

Three weeks ago, I walked on cobbles across the nearly dry riverbed amidst the stench of decaying fish and algae. That time of year, the Poudre historically would have been at least calf-deep. As it was, I would have had to dig with a shovel to soak my ankles in the meager current.

But during an evening walk this week, my wife and I walked again along the river, where we watched a heron flap in its stately way over the v-shaped paths of fish racing out of its path. It gave us heart that the Poudre still has some life in her, though it is life that will not last if we don't act.

NISP/Glade must not be built. Here's why:

NISP/Glade would be unnecessary if the proponents invest instead in conservation, improved water use and delivery efficiency, and agricultural water-sharing agreements. Such investments would be two to 10 times cheaper than building NISP/Glade.

If built, NISP/Glade will erode away our investment in parks, natural areas and recreation on the Poudre. The Poudre is already severely degraded with 60 percent of its water drained before it gets to Fort Collins. NISP/Glade would drain 40 percent of what's left, leaving behind less than one-quarter of the Poudre's natural flow.

Dozens of businesses in LaPorte, Fort Collins, Windsor and Greeley have a direct stake in the river, and dozens more draw income indirectly from them. NISP puts these businesses at risk.

NISP/Glade is a debt disaster in the making at a time when we know all too well the consequences of banking on speculation. Debt loads of hundreds of millions of dollars would have to be paid for by new development. A blip in the economy, or a downturn like the current one, would lead to skyrocketing water rates and desperate budget measures.

The project threatens farms and ranches throughout the Northern Front Range. At least 25,000 acres of farmland in Larimer, Weld, Boulder and Morgan counties would literally have to be developed just to pay for the project.

The Northern District would like us to believe NISP/Glade is inevitable. The only thing inevitable about NISP/Glade is the death of the Poudre River if the project gets built. We are not helpless victims of circumstance, nor are we subject to the grandiose schemes of insular, taxpayer-subsidized government agencies. We live in a democracy where the rule of law and the will of the people still must carry the day.

But the will of the people only is heard when the people speak.

You can help Save The Poudre by going to www.SaveThePoudre.org to make a donation, learn where to send a letter and sign a petition. You can attend our campaign organizing and envelope-stuffing party at the Bean Cycle Coffeehouse, 144 N. College, anytime between 6 and 9 p.m. today. Hope to see you there.

Mark Easter is with the Sierra Club Poudre Canyon Group and the Save the Poudre Coalition

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