
EPA report hammers NISP

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Opponents of Glade Reservoir were buoyed last week by a blistering Environmental Protection Agency review of the Northern Integrated Supply Project, which they said could delay or doom the project.

An EPA letter sent last month and publicized last week by the Save the Poudre Coalition says the EPA believes NISP would harm wildlife, plants and the water quality in the Poudre River as well as other rivers downstream.

The EPA's Denver office said the \$420 million project, which includes two reservoirs and 15 communities and water districts, does not meet the requirements of the Clean Water Act.

Noncompliance with that monolith of a federal law could conceivably doom NISP; the EPA has veto power over the permits that would be issued to allow its construction.

Water project planners said they are working to address the EPA's concerns.

A letter signed by Carol Rushin, acting regional administrator for the EPA's western region, states the agency believes more information is necessary before Glade or Galeton reservoirs could be built.

"Based on the current information available, the proposed action will have substantial and unacceptable impacts on aquatic resources of national importance," Rushin wrote.

Gary Wockner, a spokesman for the Save the Poudre Coalition, said the letter spelled trouble for the project.

"It's a devastating critique by the ultimate power authority in this process, and it's saying exactly what we've been saying for four years," he said. "We are requesting that the (Army) Corps of Engineers stop their process immediately and address the EPA's concerns, including evaluating the Healthy Rivers Alternative."

Members of the river coalition put forth that plan, which envisions storing water in gravel pits and aquifers, as an alternative to NISP.

But the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, which hopes to build NISP, said the situation is not so bad.

"We're trying to get more particular in terms of their concerns and issues and how we address them," said Brian Werner, a spokesman for Northern Water. "I'm not downplaying the concerns and comments, because we do take that stuff seriously, but at the same time, it is part of the process. ... We're working through it."

He added that EPA officials recently took a tour of the Poudre, and water district officials believe they can address the agency's concerns. He said Northern Water is set to release a flurry of information about water-quality issues, which also had been raised by the cities of Fort Collins and Greeley.

Meanwhile, Wockner said he hoped the Corps would stop its review process and either go back to the drawing board or add the Healthy Rivers plan to its formal environmental assessment.

He said the EPA's comments show additional work is necessary.

"This is very, very big news for this project," he said.

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