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reporterherald.com

Publish Date: 9/3/2008

Fort Collins balks at water plan

City worried over perceived 'negative impacts'

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FORT COLLINS — Fears of poor drinking water quality and negative effects to the environment and recreational opportunities along the Cache la Poudre River led Fort Collins officials to voice their opposition Tuesday night to the Northern Integrated Supply Project.

The Fort Collins City Council adopted a resolution 6-0 instructing City Manager Darin Atteberry to submit comments to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers stating the council's opposition to the project as it is currently described in the draft environmental impact statement. Councilor Wade Troxell was absent.

"There are major, major negative impacts on Fort Collins," said Mayor Doug Hutchinson, adding that city officials hope their comments would be taken seriously because the resolution did not express full opposition to the project.

The Northern Integrated Supply Project includes the proposed Glade Reservoir north of Ted's Place along U.S. 287. The project would provide water for 15 municipalities and water districts, but Fort Collins and Loveland municipal water systems are not among them.

Some councilors voiced extreme opposition to the project.

"I want to protect the Poudre River and I want to defeat (the supply project)," said Mayor Pro Tem Kelly Ohlson, adding that passing the resolution was the first major step in accomplishing that.

The federal agency submitted the draft impact statement in late April and will continue taking comments on it until Sept. 13.

Fort Collins officials and staff members say the statement contains various contradictions, omissions and inadequate analyses in several areas.

"First, we're looking for a better analysis about the impacts," said Natural Resources Director John Stokes.

City staff members believe that the project poses "substantial" and "grave" threats to the city's drinking water quality because of high levels of total organic carbon and other contaminants if water is transferred from Glade to Horsetooth Reservoir, according to a report to the City Council.

The reduction of flows and degradation of water quality from the Poudre River could cost the city millions to install expensive advanced wastewater treatment systems at the city's two wastewater facilities, Stokes said.

Another concern is the potential effects on the environment and wildlife along the Poudre because of reduced flows.

Reduced flows could also have negative effects on recreational use of the Poudre, such as tubing and a proposed whitewater park, staff said.

Many of the 31 residents who came to comment on the Northern Integrated Supply Project gave impassioned pleas to the council to vote in favor of the resolution.

"I love the river dearly. I know my friends better because of the time we have spent there," said Fort Collins resident Jesse Perkins. "I am just here to beg the council to do whatever it takes to keep anything from happening to the river."

CSU student Ally Eden added, "(The river) defines our city; it makes our city special."

Brian Werner, spokesman for the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, said he thought it was premature for the City Council to pass a resolution opposing the Northern Integrated Supply Project, because there hadn't been any conversations about what could be done to mitigate the effects.

"We think it's a project that is necessary for the region to address," he said. "We want to work with you on this."

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