

North Forty News

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Fort Collins condemns 'adverse impacts' of NISP

By Cherry Sokoloski
North Forty News

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The Fort Collins City Council in September hammered the Northern Integrated Supply Project, saying the project--as proposed--would have "major adverse impacts" on the portion of the Poudre River that flows through Fort Collins and would potentially cost the city millions in new water and wastewater treatment facilities.

Mayor Doug Hutchinson said in a later interview, however, that he could support the project if necessary changes are made.

A unanimous resolution by the city council called for a supplemental draft environmental impact statement to be prepared by the Army Corps of Engineers, permitting agency for NISP.

"The DEIS is substantially deficient and a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement must be prepared by the Corps in order to meet the requirements of NEPA and the federal Clean Water Act," the resolution stated.

The resolution, accompanied by a 200-page report outlining the city's concerns, was forwarded to the Army Corps.

The preferred alternative for NISP would include a new Glade Reservoir northwest of LaPorte. Water would be diverted from the Poudre River to fill the reservoir, diminishing streamflow as the river goes through Fort Collins.

Hutchinson said the city acted appropriately in taking its stand, adding that the report was based on a comprehensive study by two independent consultants. "This is responsible governance, to say 'Wait a minute'" when the city sees flaws in a project, he said. "We would be remiss not to oppose it. The best time to fix problems is before you turn that first shovelful of dirt."

Nonetheless, Hutchinson said, the city's position has been misrepresented. "I believe the major problems can be solved with mitigations," he said.

The city owes future generations a dependable water supply, Hutchison said, just as those who built the Colorado-Big Thompson Project provided water for present-day citizens.

Earlier this year, the city allocated \$700,000 to study impacts from NISP as outlined in the draft EIS. Major problems identified by consultants included possible degradation of drinking water supplies in Horsetooth Reservoir. If water quality in Horsetooth is degraded, the city might have to spend \$100 million to construct a more advanced water treatment system, in addition to about \$3 million more in annual operating costs.

The report's argument is based on the possibility that a portion of the water in Glade would be piped to Horsetooth Reservoir. Since most of the water in Glade would be taken from the Poudre during the spring runoff, it would contain high levels of total organic carbon. TOC has to be removed in the treatment process to satisfy federal requirements, so higher levels in Horsetooth would require more treatment.

The Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, sponsor of NISP, issued a response to the city's resolution and report. "I guarantee Northern Water has no intention of doing anything that would adversely impact the quality of water in Horsetooth Reservoir," said general manager Eric Wilkinson. "Horsetooth is a vital part of our delivery system, and protecting it is essential to us."

The city's studies also concluded that Fort Collins might have to invest in advanced wastewater treatment systems as a result of poorer water quality in the river. If the river becomes more polluted due to lower streamflow and less dilution, another \$100 million might be required to upgrade wastewater treatment facilities, the report said.

The financial impacts of these two treatment requirements, Hutchinson noted, would equal two full years of the city's general fund budget.

The report points out serious flaws and omissions in the draft EIS, Hutchinson said. One such omission was a failure to include the Drake wastewater treatment center in the EIS modeling of water quality with NISP.

"That was one of 12 major errors," the mayor stated.

The Northern Water Conservancy District, sponsor of the project, has talked

about mitigations, Hutchinson noted, but these must be spelled out in detail.

The city's report to the Army Corps contained comments around several different themes, including water management, environmental concerns, recreation issues, aesthetic impacts, climate change and air quality, impacts on future Fort Collins projects, mitigation, and errors and omissions in the EIS. Details include impacts on fish habitat, the possibility of increased flooding risks from sedimentation in the river and impacts on vegetation and wetlands along the river.

The city's full report can be accessed online at www.fcgov.com/nispreview.

Hutchinson said he is proud of the city council's handling of "a very emotional issue."

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