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The Northern Integrated Supply Project (NISP) is behind the proposed Glade Reservoir, which is slated to be located northwest of Fort Collins and north of Horsetooth Reservoir.

NISP is collaboration between the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District in Berthoud and 15 Front Range water districts and municipalities. Brian Werner, spokesperson for the project, explained that its inception dates back to the mid-1980s when the Cache la Poudre River was designated a wild and scenic river—the only one in northern Colorado.

Back then, “the idea was to build a big reservoir on the river, but at that time, the opposition group, Don’t Dam the Poudre,” caused a change in plan.

Now, the reservoir would not be located on the river, but off-site, Werner explained. “We listened to the people for 25 years, and that’s why we’ve moved it off stream,” he said.

The plan, which is in the “permitting phase,” will provide these 15 participants with 40,000 acre-feet of new, reliable municipal water supply. The proposed facilities include Glade and Galeton Reservoirs, a pumping facility and pipeline to transport water for exchange with two irrigation companies and needed upgrades to an existing canal to fill up Glade Reservoir.

“Emerging communities in northern Colorado that don’t date back 100 years like Fort Collins does, need water, too,” said Werner. Communities such as Severance, Erie, Frederick, Eaton, Windsor, and Wellington are some of the participants who would benefit from the approximately 40,000 acre-feet of firm water yield each year, Werner said.

Future water needs in these communities are expected to triple by 2050, even taking water conservation measures into account.

Opponents to the plan, including Save the Poudre Coalition, are fighting the proposal. “Save the Poudre includes all conservation groups in northern Colorado—they are all against this project,” said Gary Wockner, spokesperson for the Save the Poudre Coalition. Wockner, a Fort Collins resident since 1999, also serves on the Water Board in Fort Collins.

The Coalition’s website finds irony in the construction of the reservoirs. “New dams aren’t actually needed in our region. Northern Colorado communities, industry, and agriculture can meet their needs for water for drought protection and growth by conserving existing water resources and utilizing them at maximum efficiency.”

Werner disagrees that communities’ water needs can be met in the future. “Some communities are already water-short. All of them in the partnership will be short water by 2020. If this reservoir is not built, we will rapidly dry up northern Colorado. They only have six to ten years until they will be forced to only use ditch companies for water—a more expensive choice. NISP would double the yield of the water supply to these providers,” said Werner, a resident of northern Colorado for 30 years.

“We cannot conserve our way to future supply, as much as some say we can,” Werner stated, pointing out that half our water usage goes to keep our landscapes green, which is why the NCWCD’s grounds include a conservation garden “like none other in the world.”

The US Army Corps of Engineers is charged with ensuring rules created by the National Environmental Policy Act are complied with. By early March, they will draft an Environmental Impact Statement. Larimer County will propose and hold one to two public meetings for public information, Werner said.

NCWCD asserted the rigorous, four-year, \$5 million environmental impact study (EIS) led by the US Army Corps of Engineers is based on sound science. “The work contains an analysis by recognized experts in the fields of water quality, aquatic biology, socioeconomics and hydrology, among others. The draft EIS, expected to be released to the public in early 2008, will contain information needed for the Corps to make a NISP permit decision. Any delay of this process will increase the already considerable cost to the residents and customers of the 15 participants.”

While some wetlands will be displaced by building Glade, no homes will be displaced by the reservoir itself. “Stream flow issues concern some, but we will only get water from late April through June. (The river goes dry now, sometimes, due to people diverting it.) But there are three minimum stream flows, so if those aren’t met, we won’t take any water from the river,” Werner said.

But Wockner and his group claim that the additional 40 percent of the water taken out of the Poudre will dry the mouth of the canyon. “The Poudre is already severely degraded. Only half of the water that should flow, currently does. Our goal is to stop the project—below the mouth of the canyon, the Poudre is already a public health hazard due to poor water quality. This project will degrade the downtown development activity and wildlife,” he said.

NCWCD currently owns 70 percent of the land where Glade will potentially be created (north of Ted’s Place); the State Land Board owns a small percentage, which the NCWCD may be able to trade for, Werner said.

However, in order for the project to be, US Highway 287 needs to be moved to the east two miles. Private property owners will be affected in the 287-relocation project, Werner admitted.

Currently, NISP gains 60 percent of its yield through agricultural partnerships. Partnering with local ditch companies to provide water to northeastern Colorado communities is a win-win for the farmers, the 15 participants and the environment, NCWCD maintains.

Wockner disagrees, stating, “no farmer will benefit from the reservoir—the water is all for the cities, not farmers.”

Werner said city officials ought to consider NISP’s reservoir goals. “Without it, NISP developers will buy up the farmers. They say the last cash crop of a farmer isn’t his land, it’s his water supply. Water flows upstream—towards money,” he said, adding, “So much of what makes this region a wonderful place to live is the open land. We do not want to dry up our agriculture.”

Another standout feature of northern Colorado is its outdoor recreation opportunities. “Through Monroe Diversion, we will be able to lengthen two to three miles of River Run for rafters near Gateway Park,” Werner said. “In-stream flow requirements will ensure water remains in the river through Fort Collins

whenever NISP is diverting. Also, the planned NISP facilities will only divert up to a third of the average peak flow, and will often divert a small fraction of the flows. The river's fishery, habitat and aesthetic values will continue to be of high quality," NCWCD said in a statement.

Yet the Save the Poudre Coalition says the truth is the "NISP/Glade will dramatically change the hydrological system around the Poudre such that the area-wide water table will be lower, likely lowering river flows year-round. Further, this NISP/Glade project is one of three huge planned projects on the Poudre—the other two will remove even more water. The cumulative effects of these projects (which no one yet wants to talk about) will be even more devastating to the ecology and recreation in the river."

The Coalition asserts, "In addition to the direct impacts of Glade Reservoir on the Poudre, it will fuel rapid regional population growth; ultimately lead to the depletion of our agricultural heritage and economy; and greatly harm our local river-dependent economy."

If the District and the participants receive approval to build NISP, Glade reservoir would potentially be completed by 2014, and Galeton would be finished by 2020. Together, they represent a \$400 million project, to be paid for by the 15 participants, who will pay a portion of the costs based on the percentage of NISP water they request.

To cover costs, some communities have built up funds; others will pay for the project through rate-structure increases and tap fees, Werner said. "The project will reduce water to \$10,000 an acre-foot, but the current cost of water is \$12-15,000 an acre-foot. The growth of communities is paying for the project, making it economically viable," Werner said.

For more on both sides of the issue, visit www.ncwcd.org and www.savethepoudre.org.