FORT COLLINS : NOW

SERVING AMERICA'S BEST PLACE TO LIVE

Fried: Frankly, My Dear, I Still Don't Want a Dam

By Eric Fried
May 7, 2008

It's even worse than we thought.

We've known for a long time that if Glade Reservoir is ever built, it
will devastate what's left of the Poudre River we all love. We just
didn't know how badly. Now we have it in black and white, in
numbers that don't lie, thanks to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' long-awaited, 700-page tome
known as the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Dry as it is, it makes fascinating reading.
How often do you get to read the coroner's report before the murder occurs?

About the author

Eric Fried prefers a Poudre
to a puddle at
eric@pvgreens.org

The critical finding is that in an average year, diverting water to fill Glade would take away over half
the river's flow through Fort Collins during the snowmelt-swollen June Rise. The June Rise is critical
to the overall health of the river ecosystem. It's the difference between a living body of water and a
glorified drainage ditch. Creating Glade—an artificial lake that would be bigger than Horsetooth
Reservoir and require the rerouting of state highway 287 north of Ted's Place—would drain more
than 70 percent of the river flow in May of an average year. We might as well kiss our downtown
kayak park goodbye, forget our civic dreams of an Old Town river connection, and shelve the plans
for a downtown convention center with hordes of new tourists.

The price tag of the entire Northern Integrated Supply Project (including Glade and Galeton
reservoirs) is currently estimated at $426 million, to be financed by bonds issued by the participating
cities and special districts. Ever checked your mortgage? With interest, the actual cost is at least
twice the face value, meaning that once the banks get their cut, Glade will cost almost a billion
dollars. And that's without cost over-runs, which we all know never happen in big construction
projects.

The worst part is, none of this is necessary, and the Corps didn't even consider the logical alternative:
use less water. Legally, they were prevented from even considering that most conservative and
reasonable idea. When they considered "alternatives" to building the billion-dollar boondoggle, the
possibilities all had to supply the same amount of water as Glade would. Therefore, everything the
Corps considered—including the obligatory "no action" alternative—involved dams, diversions, and
drying up farmland. No wonder it took them four years to produce a document that portrays Glade as
the best road to the wrong destination.

One group happy with the EIS, naturally, is the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District. In
reality, the water district is not about conservation. They lose money when we conserve water. They
make money by selling water. They have as much incentive to conserve as Exxon-Mobil does to
promote fuel-efficient cars. Don't be fooled by the Xeriscape garden behind their shiny new
headquarters in Berthoud. It's just window dressing.

We live in an arid, semi-desert environment that's lucky to get a dozen inches of rain a year. It's time we embraced that reality instead of engaging in make-believe. We must rethink how we live within our water budget. We need serious conservation strategies, not lip service employed by communities hoping to cash in on a Glade-fueled growth boom. Heck, even here in "environmentally aware" Fort Collins, I see people watering their driveways, sidewalks and gutters on a daily basis, in a vain attempt to keep their non-native lawns green and their gas-guzzling cars clean. I see farmland used mostly to grow fodder for trophy horses and to fatten cows to make more quarter-pounders to clog our arteries. And for that we're willing to kill the river that gives our town its very existence?

Now that the EIS document is finally out, the clock is running on the 90-day comment period. To find out what you can do to preserve our lifeline, go to www.savethepoudre.org, and please attend the upcoming public meeting on June 17 at the Senior Center.

BACK ⬅