

Future of Poudre, One of America's Most Endangered Rivers of 2008, Still Hangs in the Balance

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By: American Rivers

Eight Months After "Most Endangered River" Listing, Overwhelming Opposition to Misguided Water Diversion Scheme

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Washington, DC — Eight months after American Rivers named the Cache la Poudre one of America's Most Endangered Rivers™ for 2008, American Rivers is calling on the Army Corps of Engineers to reevaluate the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Northern Integrated Supply Project (NISP/Glade) and include a study of the "Healthy Rivers Alternative" an alternative to NISP created by the Save The Poudre Coalition and its partners. The Healthy Rivers Alternative is a smarter and more cost-effective water supply plan that includes water efficiency measures.

The NISP/Glade Reservoir scheme would divert billions of gallons of water away from Poudre, Colorado's only Wild and Scenic River. Such action could severely threaten Fort Collins which considers the river one of its economic engines. The project would cost homeowners and taxpayers almost a billion dollars, and subject regional residents and future generations to the debt for 30 years.

After receiving roughly 10,000 comments opposing the NISP/Glade Reservoir in September, the Corps was forced to delay the project for at least one year. The agency must now determine whether to simply address specific concerns, or to issue an entirely new environmental impact statement. A decision is expected by February 2009.

In October, the Environmental Protection Agency objected to the NISP/Glade Reservoir DEIS, stating "EPA believes that the DEIS does not support the Proposed Action [NISP/Glade] as the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative. EPA is concerned that alternatives exist that would have less adverse impacts to the aquatic environment, specifically alternatives which include agricultural-municipal leases and long-term transfers, and conservation."

American Rivers and its partners called on the Environmental Protection Agency to strongly encourage the Army Corps to evaluate the Healthy Rivers Alternative or face a veto of NISP/Glade using its authority under the Clean Water Act.

"We need 21st century ideas to combat the 21st century problems we're facing due to water scarcity and global warming," said American Rivers President Rebecca Wodder. "We need to approach solutions not with ideas that our great-grandparents would have thought of, but rather with innovations that will make our grandchildren proud of us."

NISP/Glade would divert a staggering 36 million gallons of water a day away from the river before it reaches Fort Collins, enough to fill an Olympic sized swimming pool every eight minutes. Meanwhile the energy costs and the potential greenhouse gas emissions that would be caused by the project are equally enormous. NISP/Glade would require a massive pumping station be constructed to carry the water more than 3 miles to the proposed reservoir site: a scenic canyon that would be drowned by this flawed idea.

"The scientific comments against NISP/Glade have been devastating," said Gary Wockner, Spokesman for the Save the Poudre Coalition. "The cities of Fort Collins and Greeley, Larimer County, the State of Colorado, and finally the U.S. EPA have all weighed in the NISP/Glade DEIS was one of the worst ever written. It is irresponsible to move forward with this proposal. The Army Corps needs to evaluate better alternatives immediately."

Colorado municipalities and water districts have yet to embrace the solutions that others across the country have. Many cities have adopted tiered water rates that would provide financial incentives for customers to use less water, and penalize those who are wasteful. Others provide discounted or even free water-efficient fixtures and appliances for residents. Adopting these measures, and adopting the Healthy Rivers Alternative to NISP/Glade, would be cheaper, better protect the Poudre River, and better protect farmers in northern Colorado.

The Poudre flows 140 miles from its protected headwaters in Rocky Mountain National Park to a confluence with the South Platte River. The Poudre's upper reaches are a hotspot for fly fishing, rafting, floating, camping, hiking, and a scenic respite from city life. Such activities help power the Fort Collins economy. NISP/Glade would reduce the Poudre to a near-trickle before it reaches the city which could devastate the river and the natural areas along the river through Fort Collins.

About America's Most Endangered Rivers™

Each year, American Rivers solicits nominations from thousands of river groups, environmental organizations, outdoor clubs, local governments, and taxpayer watchdogs for the America's Most Endangered Rivers™ report. The report highlights the rivers facing the most uncertain futures rather than those suffering from the worst chronic problems. The report presents alternatives to proposals that would damage rivers, identifies those who make the crucial decisions, and points out opportunities for the public to take action on behalf of each listed river.

The America's Most Endangered Rivers™ report results in thousands of supporters taking action on behalf of their beloved river. Such action produces immediate and tangible result. To see success stories visit www.AmericanRivers.org/MERSuccesses