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Glade backers: Project likely delayed

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Backers of the Glade Reservoir project say they're confident the water-supply project will win federal approval, but they are now expecting that approval to come sometime next year instead of by the end of 2008.

Brian Werner, a spokesman for Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, said most elements of the Northern Integrated Supply Project have taken longer than initially projected.

Northern Water had once hoped to have the project complete by 2014 but is now looking at a 2016 completion date.

"We hope to be able to start design in 2009," Werner said Tuesday. "It's taking longer than expected. We're at the mercy of the process in some ways. But we want to make sure the Army Corps gets this done right."

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has the power to approve or deny NISP based on environmental considerations, and earlier this summer asked supporters and critics to offer comments on a draft environmental impact statement.

NISP would supply growing cities and towns east and south of Fort Collins with water from the Poudre River, among other sources, by storing high springtime flows in a new reservoir, Glade, northwest of Fort Collins.

NISP is being fought tooth-and-nail by local environmental activists, and the city of Fort Collins has formally outlined a slew of concerns about the project's impacts.

Save the Poudre Coalition spokesman Gary Wockner said he thinks comments submitted by the coalition, Fort Collins and other skeptics were "devastating," and said he believes the Corps will reject the proposal.

"NISP got overwhelmingly negative comments on the DEIS," Wockner said. "This project is looking increasingly suspect, because of the environmental problems and the growth projections that the cities are using, and the financing scheme."

Fort Collins would get none of the water from NISP, which could dramatically lower summertime stream flows through the city. Last month, the city asked the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to issue a supplemental DEIS, which could further delay approval.

NISP's opponents have threatened legal action to block the project, which they say is too big, too expensive, and not needed given the economic climate. Supporters point out that few of the people who live on the Front Range today could live here without past water projects, such as the Colorado-Big Thompson, and Horsetooth Reservoir.

Wockner said his coalition has proposed an alternative solution, using smaller reservoirs and buying

water as necessary as growth occurs, which would protect local cities and towns from huge up-front construction costs for Glade and associated pipelines.

Northern Water says the large project is needed because the growth will occur regardless, and building now will save money in the long run.
