

Glade study disputed Analysis catches both sides by surprise

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Projected reductions in the Poudre River's flow through Fort Collins in a federal analysis of a new reservoir took both sides of the debate by surprise.

A draft environmental impact statement on the Northern Integrated Supply Project, which includes Glade Reservoir northwest of Fort Collins, indicates the reservoir's draw on the river could result in a 71 percent drop in flows through the city during May in year with average precipitation.

The projections show the reservoir, which would be built north of Ted's Place, would reduce flows through the city nearly every month of every year, with the largest volume of water taken in June during the height of the spring runoff.

The potential magnitude of the drawdown on the river raised eyebrows with long-standing opponents to the project, who say it would only take more water from an already beleaguered Poudre.

"With the modeling that we've been doing, we expected it would be substantial but less than that," said Mark Easter of the Save the Poudre Coalition. "That caught us a little by surprise."

The numbers may not reflect what would truly happen to the river if Glade is built, said Carl Brouwer, project manager for Glade and an engineer with the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District.

The district has proposed the Northern Integrated Supply Project, or NISP, and would build it in cooperation with 15 regional cities and water districts that would use its water. The city of Fort Collins is not a participant.

The projections were based on computer modeling that took into account decades of data, but not the district's pledge to not take water during the winter, Brouwer said. The numbers reflect "a worst-case scenario" for how much water would be taken.

"We see those numbers as being conservative, as in high," Brouwer said. "The actual reduction when everything we plan to do is in place will probably be lower in terms of percentages."

Plans for the project call for drawing water every year from the Poudre in an exchange with two irrigation companies. Glade also would be filled with water taken during periods of peak flow, primarily May through August.

When Northern Water officials saw the projections in early versions of the draft document from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, they agreed to maintain minimum stream flows through the city if the project were built, Brouwer said.

The final environmental impact statement for the project would call for mitigation to offset its environmental impacts.

Steps that would ensure enough flow to provide habitat for fish and potential recreation include moving the intake for the Lake Canal, which pulls water from the river just west of College Avenue.

Lake Canal superintendent Don Magnuson said the company would be open to discussing moving its diversion structure, possibly near Mulberry Street and east of Lemay Avenue.

"We think something can be worked out," he said.

The formal release of the draft EIS on Wednesday launched a 90-day comment period during which individuals, government agencies and organizations may offer opinions on the document and project to the Corps.

Glade opponents say they still need time to dig into the draft EIS. Save the Poudre expects to challenge many elements of the document, said spokesman Gary Wockner.

The project will only further degrade the river, he said. Reaching a compromise with the Corps and Northern Water may not be possible.

"The Poudre River is already wildly out of balance and severely compromised," he said. "Our goal is still to stop the project."

Brouwer said mitigation would be required if a permit is issued for the project. All opinions will be considered in coming up with those requirements.

Save the Poudre's "all-or-nothing" attitude doesn't take into account all the possibilities, he said.

"They are not the only players at the table," he said.

