

Glade would slurp up Poudre River

Study: Flow would decrease most months, but steps could lessen impact

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The proposed Glade Reservoir would reduce the Poudre River's flow through Fort Collins by 71 percent in May and more than half as runoff peaks in June, according to an in-depth federal environmental analysis of the project.

The Northern Integrated Supply Project, which includes Glade, would reduce flow through the city "in most months in most years," but steps also could be taken to improve the river's flow in certain times of the year, improving fish habitat, stabilizing the river channel and increasing recreational opportunities, according to the report.

The long-awaited draft Environmental Impact Statement, or EIS, for the reservoir and the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District's proposed Northern Integrated Supply Project will be formally released today. The document by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was posted Tuesday on the Corps' Web site.

The 702-page document, which took four years and about \$6 million to produce, looks at four alternatives for the project known as NISP, including not building its proposed water storage facilities.

The NISP alternative preferred by Northern Water calls for building Glade Reservoir north of Ted's Place and Galeton Reservoir near Greeley.

Galeton would draw water from the South Platte River and store up to 40,000 acre feet of water. An acre foot is enough water to meet the annual needs of two urban families.

Glade Reservoir would draw from the Poudre River during periods of high flow, primarily from May through August. It would hold about 170,000 acre feet.

The project would be paid for by 15 participating communities and water districts. Fort Collins is not part of the project. The Fort Collins-Loveland Water District, which covers parts of south Fort Collins and Timnath, is a participant.

Highlights from the document include:

- > Building Glade and Galeton as proposed would cost about \$426 million and would be the least-costly alternative.
- > Taking no action could result in NISP communities developing separate water supplies, primarily buying water from agriculture, at an estimated cost of \$830 million.
- > Glade would cause the loss of 44 acres of wetlands, the fewest among the alternatives.
- > The reservoir would cause the loss of about 2,700 acres of native plant communities, or 20 percent more than other options.
- > The reservoir would cause the loss of 50 acres of habitat for the Preble's meadow jumping mouse, which is a designated as a threatened species.
- > Most of Glade's water would be taken during times of high flows. Reductions in the river's monthly average flow through Fort Collins would range from 71 percent in May in average years to 26 percent in August in dry years.
- > NISP participants currently have access to about 50,000 acre feet of water and are expected to exceed that amount by 2010. With continued population growth, the annual demand for water will reach 90,700 acre feet by 2025.
- > The region's population growth will continue whether or not Glade is built.
- > Building Glade would require the relocation of about seven miles of U.S. Highway 287 north of LaPorte.
- > Flows on the Poudre and South Platte are likely to be reduced by other proposed water projects, including the expansion of Halligan and Seaman reservoirs, if NISP is built and if it is not.

City of Fort Collins officials declined to comment Tuesday on specifics of the document.

"We want to be sure to review the draft very carefully," said John Stokes, director of natural resources. "We need to spend some time with the document."

Supporters say the project is needed to meet the water needs of fast-growing Northern Colorado communities. Critics say conservation and agreements with agricultural water uses could meet that demand without further tapping into the Poudre River.

The release begins a 90-day comment period during which the Corps will review input from residents and government agencies about the project. The agency then will begin discussions with Northern Water on the mitigation needed for a permit to be issued to build the project, said Brian Werner, spokesman for Northern Water.

"We believe we have a good project that should and can be built," Werner said. "We anticipate having a final decision by the end of the year."

Opponents of the project are preparing to dig in to the massive document and its stack of supporting technical reports, said Gary Wockner, spokesman for Save the Poudre Coalition. Opponents plan to lobby for an extension of the comment period.

A quick look at the draft EIS did not produce any surprises, he said.

"There's nothing in there that changes our mind that this project will be very bad for the Poudre River," Wockner said

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