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Groups argue over future of the Poudre

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The Reporter-Herald

Both Brian Werner and Gary Wockner expressed hope after the release Wednesday of an environmental evaluation of a proposed reservoir north of Fort Collins.

But that is where the similarity ends.

Werner, spokesman for Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, hopes and believes, in light of the report, that his agency's project will be approved. Then, he says, water will start pouring into Glade Reservoir by 2015 and will continue flowing down the Poudre River.

Wockner, spokesman for the Save the Poudre Coalition, hopes and believes his team of residents, scientists and attorneys can use the report to stop the reservoir before it drains the river, recreation opportunities and the local economy.

"At this point, we see nothing that changes our opinion that this project will be really bad for the Poudre River," he said.

Two men, two goals and two different viewpoints of the environmental assessment for the Northern Integrated Water Supply Project. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers completed the assessment.

Neither man expressed much surprise at the information in the report, which outlines the costs and environmental impacts of building Glade Reservoir north of Fort Collins, building other reservoirs or not building anything and leaving the river alone.

The proposed Glade Reservoir would harm the least amount of wetlands and cost the least, but would divert as much as 71 percent of the water from the Poudre during high-use summer months in some years, according to the report.

The reduction of water from the river, especially as it flows through Fort Collins, has been one of the key arguments offered by those against the reservoir. They worried the Poudre would dry up even before hearing the



An environmental assessment by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers examines the effects on the Poudre River of the proposed Glade Reservoir. Reporter-Herald/David Steffenson

number, 71 percent.

“There are some numbers in there that are even worse than we expected,” Wockner said.

Yes, the project will take water from the river, but it will be removed after it has roared down the canyon for rafters and fishers. And having it in the reservoir will allow officials to manage intake and release, making levels better, Werner said.

“There are some people that all they are going to do is glom onto that number,” he said.

“But look a little deeper and see the aesthetic values and riparian habitat aren’t going to be affected.”

The destroyed wetlands, and destroyed Preble’s Meadow jumping mouse habitat, will be replaced in another nearby location.

Other key points from the report include:

- The area’s population will continue to grow, whether or not the reservoir is built, and those people will need to find water. For example, Windsor, one of the towns in the project, is estimated to grow from about 15,000 people to 60,000 by 2050.
- Without a reservoir, farmers likely will start selling off water, ultimately destroying 1,384 acres of wetlands and taking \$27.1 million worth of crops out of production.
- Glade Reservoir would add \$17.1 million in recreation to the local economy.

But first, Northern Water must get permission to build.

The next step is for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to accept public input, then evaluate the proposal and decide if and how Glade could be built. Right now, the Corps is accepting input through July 30 — a time frame Wockner hopes to double from 90 to 180 days.

It will take that long, he says, to evaluate the 702-page report and 2,000 pages of supplemental documents.

Once the public comment period ends, the Corps does not have a deadline to decide about the application. Werner hopes it will approve it expeditiously so construction could begin by 2011 and finish in 2015.

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