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Let new users incur new costs

The approach being used by Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District to develop water supplies in Northern Colorado is seriously flawed.

When the taxation district, funded by property taxes, was originally authorized, power generation and irrigated agriculture in rural Northern Colorado were the primary beneficial uses of the water diverted from the Colorado River for use on the East Slope. Use of the new supply as a source of drinking water was seen as something that might occur in the future, after communities such as Fort Collins and Greeley had grown to the point where they could no longer rely exclusively on local, higher-quality drinking water sources like the Cache la Poudre River. Over time, municipal water providers acquired a majority of the shares of Colorado-Big Thompson water as the farms that originally held those shares were replaced by residential development.

NCWCD has become, in effect, a regional drinking water supply utility rather than a supplier of irrigation water. Unfortunately, the district apparently takes no responsibility whatsoever for protecting the quality of the sources it has been entrusted to oversee. It has opposed its own shareholders' efforts to protect water quality in Horsetooth Reservoir. Water Quality Control Commission records contain testimony from NCWCD opposing the 2005 placement of Horsetooth Reservoir on the EPA's list of impaired waters. That ruling was needed not only to protect fish and aquatic life, but also to protect Fort Collins' drinking water supply from further degradation.

Fort Collins was instrumental in getting that protective measure in place, but residents of Fort Collins, perhaps unknowingly, were financially supporting the district opposition to the measure (through water assessment fees paid to NCWCD by the city of Fort Collins Utilities). That is irresponsible, outrageous behavior for a tax-supported provider of municipal water supplies. One can only conclude that NCWCD has no regard for local government's water-quality policies, the health consequences to the public or for the additional water treatment costs incurred by C-BT shareholders such as Fort Collins and Greeley.

Now it appears that the district is once again ignoring the needs of Fort Collins and Greeley in order to accommodate the new water supply needs of those yet to take up residence within the district, primarily in the region immediately north of Denver. The diversion point for the proposed Glade Reservoir is below the confluence with the North Fork, a source that Fort Collins has diligently and intentionally avoided using as a drinking water supply for more than 100 years.

By building Glade Reservoir and connecting a pipeline to Horsetooth Reservoir, NCWCD will negate investments Fort Collins and Greeley residents have made, such as locating their drinking water intakes as far upstream as possible and developing high-quality mountain sources for their drinking-water supplies. If the bulk of the water provided by Glade Reservoir is to be used to serve the area immediately north of Denver, the project should include a pipeline that does not connect to Horsetooth but bypasses it and extends to the area that will be receiving the additional water NCWCD plans to bring online. Let the users of the new source incur the risks and expenses associated with that source.
