

NISP: The Question of Recreation

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Debate continues over the proposed Northern Integrated Supply Project, which would create a major reservoir at the mouth of the Poudre River Canyon and literally change the landscape of recreation on the northern Front Range.

If created, Glade Reservoir could be worth \$17 million annually in public recreation for the county, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). But, members of the Larimer County Parks Advisory Board question that estimate as well as other aspects of the project. The board met Tuesday night to prepare their recommendations to the county commissioners on the NISP. They focused on the recreation aspects of the proposal: boating, fishing, biking and camping along the river and in the developed areas.

Despite conflicting data from proponents and critics of the project, the overall effect to the Poudre River is likely to be a steadier flow of water through the channel. This would mean a drastic change in the existing seasonal patterns of the river that affect fish, turtles and other related species. It would also mean changes in how and where people recreate.

Currently, most of the recreation along the Fort Collins-Poudre River corridor is passive – activities such as biking and picnicking. The board considered that a steadier river flow might improve the value of bike paths and adjacent park areas. It could also extend fishing and river tubing seasons, but limit the resources needed for kayaking below the diversion. The project is not expected to affect rafting and other activities further up the canyon.

The proposed Glade Reservoir brings the potential for new recreational opportunities in the county. Related businesses, such as boat sales and outfitters would also see a benefit. Another reservoir would provide an alternative to Carter Lake and Horsetooth Reservoir, which can be very crowded in mid-summer for Berthoud residents and visitors to the area.

And although the reservoir would not support a trout fishery, according to the County Division of Wildlife, it could potentially support other sport fish such as walleye and bass.

However, board comments were mixed when it came to the overall picture of changes the project would bring. Advisory Board member Ivan Andrade said Fort Collins and, as a result, the county's economy could be "potentially compromised by this project." Whatever the impact to recreation, NISP could have wide-ranging effects, not just on a limited area of the Poudre River as it flows through Fort Collins, but on the entire county and region of the state.

Critics of the project maintain the current river system already brings value to the economy and quality of life in the region. Andrade emphasized the proposed changes were permanent and the full impact would not be seen for years. He said, "Everything will change. Everything."

The board decided they did not have adequate information to make any recommendations on NISP, and will submit a list of comments for the county commissioners to consider.