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NISP's final hearing draws smaller group, more backers

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June 20, 2008

The proponents greatly outnumbered opponents at the final public hearing on the environmental impact statement of the Northern Integrated Supply Project Thursday night.

The project is designed to provide an additional 40,000 acre-feet of water to northern Colorado with the construction of two new reservoirs.

The hearing, hosted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at the University of Northern Colorado Thursday night, drew about 200 people to comment. Monday and Tuesday, an estimated 600 people attended similar meetings in Fort Collins.

The corps released the environmental impact statement in May and will continue to take written comments until June 29 on that statement, said Chandler Peter of the corps' Denver regulatory office.

The few who opposed the project at Greeley's meeting, however, asked for a 90-day extension of the hearing process, while those in favor of the project urged the corps to approve it so construction can start as soon as possible. In all, about 45 people registered to make comments, but the crowd had thinned considerably by 9 p.m. and by that time those in favor outnumbered those opposed by about four to one.

Jina Janett, a former mayor pro tem of Fort Collins and utilities director for the town of Milliken, was the first to oppose the project, which would build the Glade Reservoir off stem from the Poudre River north of Fort Collins and store about 170,000 acre-feet of water and the Galeton Reservoir east of Ault, which would hold 40,000 acre-feet. An acre-foot of water is enough to supplies two families with water for a year.

Janett said the project would result in lower water quality for Fort Collins and Greeley and would result in an adverse economic impact on Fort Collins, which, she said, would be forced to upgrade its water treatment facilities. It would, she added, also have an adverse effect on that city's waste water treatment system.

Other objections came from Michael Kirkpatrick, representing the Poudre River Raft Guides, who said the project would result in a "bug-infested mud bog" in the Poudre as it flows through Fort Collins and said "building a river-killing dam" is not the answer to solving the water needs of the future.

But those objections were countered by Doug Rademacher, a third generation southwest Weld County farmer who is also a Weld County commissioner.

"Without the water projects we have in place now we wouldn't have the year around flow we have in our rivers. Some of them would be dry six months of the year," he said.

Vernon Cecil of Greeley, who owns five farms in the area, said northern Colorado wouldn't be what it is today without projects such as the Colorado-Big Thompson Project.

"We've got to go ahead with this project. I'm a 'doer' and not a 'do not-er.' To keep it the way it is is not going to fly," Cecil said, noting NISP would certainly help with his struggle to keep water on his farms.

Sean Conway, Sen. Wayne Allard's chief of staff and candidate for Weld commissioner, said that without the project an estimated 60 to 100 square miles of farmland could dry up as cities turn to agriculture to provide for their future water needs.

"That would result in an environmental disaster of epidemic proportions," Conway said, noting people only have to go to Crowley County in southern Colorado to see what happens when agricultural water is removed from an area to supply city needs.

"That has returned to a high country desert with blowing sand and tumbleweeds. Why would we want to dry up 60 to 100 square miles of fertile farmland?" Conway said.

To comment on the NISP project

Written comments on the environmental impact statement on the Northern Integrated Supply Project may be sent to Chandler J. Peter, Denver Regulatory Office, 9307 S. Wadsworth Boulevard, Littleton, CO 80128-6901. Comments must be received by June 29.

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