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Northern Colorado water plans impacting each other

Glade one of many projects

BY KEVIN DUGGAN
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Building Glade Reservoir could have far-reaching impacts on other regional water projects, including long-standing proposals by the cities of Fort Collins and Greeley.

As part of the environmental review of Glade and the proposed Northern Integrated Supply Project, or NISP, federal regulators must take into the account the cumulative effects of past, present and future water projects along the North Front Range.

Among several potential projects that could affect the Poudre River and the South Platte River, both of which would lose water to NISP, are the proposed expansions of Halligan Reservoir by Fort Collins and Seaman Reservoir by Greeley.

Those reservoirs would draw from the North Fork of the Poudre upstream from where Glade would draw from the river's main stem.

Combined, the three reservoir projects would "cause significant reductions in flow" between the mouth of Poudre Canyon and the west side of Fort Collins, according to the draft Environmental Impact Statement for NISP.

The cities have combined the Halligan and Seaman projects into a single bid to receive a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The proposal is going through the Environmental Impact Statement process as the NISP proposal is being weighed.

If federal agencies issue permits for NISP, they are not likely to permit the Halligan-Seaman proposal, said Gary Wockner, spokesman for the anti-Glade group Save the Poudre Coalition.

"These reservoirs and communities are in competition with each other," he said.

It's too early to say whether a permit for Glade would preclude one for Halligan-Seaman, said Chandler Peter, National Environmental Policy Act-EIS coordinator for the Corps.

"This is a very complex process involving multiple layers of state and federal law and we have a long way to go," he said. "Saying yes or no at this point would be pure speculation."

Glade would draw from the Poudre every year, but its largest take would come during times of peak flow. Filling the reservoir could take several years, depending on annual snowfall and the subsequent spring runoff, and its level would fluctuate based on the demand for its water.

That could result in a significant amount of unused capacity at Glade, Wockner said.

"I would say as a member of the environmental community, if you got a



Rich Abrahamson/Coloradoan library

A proposed expansion of Halligan Reservoir by Fort Collins could affect the Poudre and the South Platte rivers. Federal regulators must take into account such impacts when reviewing other proposals, including the Northern Integrated Supply Project.

Water plans

Selected potential water projects that would affect the North Front Range:

Halligan and Seaman Water Management Projects

> The city of Fort Collins would enlarge Halligan Reservoir and Greeley would enlarge Seaman Reservoir to provide drought protection. Both reservoirs are along the North Fork of the Poudre River.

Windy Gap Firing Project

> Northern Water in cooperation with its municipal subdistrict would build a 90,000-acre-foot reservoir west of Carter Lake to hold water from the Western Slope.

Dry Creek Reservoir Project

> Northern Water and the Little Thompson Water District built the 8,800-acre-foot reservoir east of Carter Lake.

Moffat Collection System Project

> Denver Water has proposed adding 72,000 acre feet of storage.

Chatfield Reservoir Relocation

> Chatfield would be changed from a flood-storage reservoir to one that stores water for municipal and industrial uses.

City of Denver Reuse Project

> Denver wants to expand its water reuse plant to take full advantage of water brought from the Colorado River Basin.

City of Aurora Prairie Waters Project

> Aurora wants to reuse water it has from the Colorado River

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massive reservoir sitting there half full, it certainly doesn't make sense to permit other reservoirs," he said.

Too early to tell

How Glade and Halligan-Seaman would interact and what their cumulative effects on the Poudre would be are among the many issues the U.S. Corps of Engineers will weigh as each project goes through the EIS process, the Corps' Peter said.

The EIS process includes noting alternatives to an applicant's proposal. It's possible the evaluation of the Halligan-Seaman project could include an alternative that would have Fort Collins and Greeley join NISP, Peter said.

That wouldn't necessarily be in the best interests of the cities, Fort Collins and Greeley officials say, because NISP and Halligan-Seaman are separate projects with different purposes and goals.

Halligan-Seaman is meant to provide long-term drought protection for the cities' water supplies, said Jon Monson, director of water and sewer for Greeley. NISP is intended to supply water for participating communities as they grow.

Competing interests

Under the proposal, Seaman would be expanded from 5,000 acre feet of water to 53,000 acre feet by 2030. An acre foot of water is enough to meet the needs of two urban households for a year.

Halligan would be expanded from 6,400 acre feet to 40,000. It would hold water for Fort Collins as well as local water districts and the North Poudre Irrigation Co. If permitted, construction could begin in 2010.

Kevin Gertig, acting water resources and treatment manager for Fort Collins, said the city will work with the Corps in defining the need for Halligan-Seaman even if NISP is built.

"We feel the Halligan-Seaman project will be the best way to meet the needs of Fort Collins," he said.

Greeley probably wouldn't be able to join NISP because it wouldn't be able to fund a project that early, Monson said.

The city has other water projects going on - including building a new pipeline from its Bellvue treatment plant to Greeley - and doesn't plan on building the Seaman expansion until 2029, he said.

"We don't want to pour concrete into the river until we are ready financially," Monson said.

Having three large reservoirs in close proximity to each other is an issue the Corps will weigh during the EIS process, Peter said. But it also has to consider the cumulative effects of a long list of projects that could impact flows in the Poudre and South Platte rivers.

Projects that are included in the NISP evaluation range from proposals in metro Denver to reuse water brought over from the Western Slope to Fort Collins' plan to build a kayak park along the Poudre.

Areas that are looked at include water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, vegetation, soils, endangered species and recreation.

NISP and Halligan-Seaman should not be viewed as competing projects, said Brian Werner, spokesman for Northern Water.

"We feel NISP stands on its own feet," he said. "Both of these projects can be built, but we have to let the process run its course."

and Arkansas River basins.

Cache la Poudre River Flood Reduction and Ecosystem Restoration Project

> The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is evaluating the feasibility of flood control and restoration measures on the river through Greeley.

Greeley-Bellvue Pipeline

> Greeley is constructing a 60-inch water pipe 30 miles from its water treatment plant in Bellvue to its water distribution system.

Source: Northern Integrated Supply Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

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