

Coloradoan Soapbox
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Options Highlight Environmental Justice

One issue surrounding Glade Reservoir has received too little attention – environmental and social justice.

The President's Council on Environmental Quality directs agencies such as the Army Corps of Engineers to "recognize the interrelated cultural, social, occupational, historical or economic factors that may amplify the natural and physical environmental effects of the proposed agency action."

If Glade were built as currently envisioned, some communities such as Fort Collins and Greeley would be asked to sacrifice resources and quality of life so that other communities outside the project area might eventually benefit from expected growth.

Many of us in the affected area have worked for decades on boards and commissions and through our elected officials to develop sound county and municipal land-use plans, water supply and conservation strategies and a cohesive vision for our communities. This vision calls for minimization of agricultural loss to maintain working landscapes, utilizing cluster development in rural areas, open space acquisitions, private land conservation, advanced water and storm water planning, and a variety of partnerships with agriculture.

Impacts from NISP spoil this vision. Specialists from the city of Fort Collins, Colorado State University and elsewhere have revealed that the Glade project would induce a host of impacts: reduced flows, diminished water quality, increased water treatment costs, weakened riparian ecosystem functioning, diminished value of open space along the Poudre, years of construction associated impacts such as loss of dwindling aggregate resources, highway relocation, loss of the unique tumble-down rimrock landscape in Hook and Moore Glade, impacts to North Poudre irrigators etc.

Locals are asked to bear such impacts to supply water to small towns, bedroom communities, special districts and Denver suburbs. Many of the NISP partners are havens to developers (many out-of-state corporations) precisely because planning has been scarce, regulations more permissive and unbridled annexations have been approved by those promising future jobs and tax revenues.

Though we here have worked in an open democratic process to build consensus and adopt master plans and land protection programs, we now find ourselves faced with an enormous project where offering comments to the Corps is our sole access to the decision process short of litigation. Our elected officials can comment but not determine the outcome. Because planning for NISP was never an inclusive or participatory regional process, this is a socio-economic or social justice issue overlooked by the draft EIS and is likely sufficient grounds for litigation.

Is this a new form of "takings"? Must it be that each time smaller rural communities wish to grow, other established communities must sacrifice their resources and hard-won quality of life? One of the goals of NEPA is "to balance population growth and

resource use." As currently conceived, Glade Reservoir seems out of balance. It is at once highly consumptive of resources in the project area and an engine for population growth largely outside the project area.

Alternatives to Glade have recently been proposed that would use fewer resources and produce fewer impacts in the communities not participating in NISP. Such alternatives would foster environmental justice, provide tangible benefits to agriculture (water sharing agreements) while allowing some continued growth. A revised EIS should give these alternatives the attention they are due.

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