

Rally in support of water-storage project

FORT LUPTON - Elected leaders and others were gathering Tuesday at Fort Lupton Historical Park to rally in support of a proposed water storage and distribution project opposed by environmentalists.

Former U.S. Sen. Hank Brown, state lawmakers, mayors of Northern Colorado towns and people in the agriculture industry were expected to speak at the event this afternoon in support of the Northern Integrated Supply Project.

"The current drought throughout Northern Colorado has brought home a stark reality - we need more water storage and soon," Weld County Commissioner Sean Conway has said. "Without it our children and grandchildren's future will be at risk."

The project would supply 15 Northern Colorado water partners, including 11 towns and cities, with 40,000 acre-feet of reliable water supplies. It would consist of two reservoirs, pipelines and pump plants.

Environmentalists contend the project will drain too much water from the Poudre River. Save the Poudre in Fort Collins argues that the project will siphon off as much as 71 percent of the river's flow through Fort Collins.

During peak flows, pumps would suck about 1,000 cubic feet per second from the river, according to the environmental group.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers wrote Gov. John Hickenlooper last month that studying the project has taken longer than expected "due to concerns regarding potential cumulative impacts to the Cache la Poudre River." The government agency estimates it will issue a supplemental draft environmental impact statement on the project next fall.

"This is great news for the Poudre River," Gary Wockner, director of Save the Poudre, said in a statement issued Monday. "This river-destroying project has now been delayed for five years with no end in sight."

Meanwhile, Weld County farmers have struggled to maintain their crops during the drought. Crop insurance claims are up, people in the industry say, despite overflowing groundwater wells that remain shut off to Weld farmers.

The project "would provide the water storage we need to support Northern Colorado's growing communities and provide protection to economies and families when the weather turns dry," Rep. Cory Gardner said in a statement.