

Reports agree on Glade's potential for harm

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Reducing the Poudre River's flow through Fort Collins would harm the river's ecology and hurt the city's economy, according to a set of three reports released Friday.

The city-sponsored reports examine the potential impact on the river through town from the Northern Integrated Supply Project, or NISP, proposed by the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District.

The project includes Glade Reservoir, which would be built north of Ted's Place. Water for the proposed reservoir would be drawn from the river near the mouth of Poudre Canyon primarily during the peak flows of the spring runoff.

Cutting the river's peak flows in half, as predicted in some models of NISP's impacts, would make the river less attractive and reduce visitations, according to an analysis by John Loomis, an economist at Colorado State University.

The analysis of the economic impact of river flows through town was based on a survey of Fort Collins residents that included questions about how often they visit the river and how much they spend per visit.

About a third of those surveyed said they would visit the river less if its flows were cut in half, with 5 percent saying they would stop visiting.

Reduced visitation would translate to fewer dollars spent in the downtown area, according to the report. The median economic value of a visit to the river is \$15, according to Loomis' report.

The survey also found Fort Collins residents would be willing to pay an average of \$342 per household to ensure flows are maintained.

"Eighty-three percent of those surveyed indicated that a 50 percent reduction in peak spring and summer flows in the Poudre River through town would be a 'bad change,' with nearly two-thirds saying it would be a 'very bad change,'" the report states.

An analysis by the Poudre Technical Advisory Group made up of experts from CSU and local offices of federal agencies found reduced flows would likely harm riparian areas along the river.

Water quality and habitat for wildlife and fish would be degraded by the lack of high flows, according to the report. Over time the river would look and behave like a "long, narrow lake" bordered by non-native plants.

The reports were completed before the release of a draft environmental study of NISP early this week by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, said John Stokes, director of natural resources for the city.

They were meant to be preliminary and not as detailed as the Corps' draft Environmental Impact Statement, or EIS, Stokes said. City staff members will use the reports and the draft EIS in crafting comments to send to the Corps, Stokes said.

Steps to mitigate the impacts of flow reductions, such as increasing flows other times of the year as proposed by Northern Water, were not considered in shaping the reports, he said.

"We did not have the benefit of the EIS in doing these reports," he said. "History has passed them by, in a way."

The reports mirror what opponents of NISP have been saying all along, especially concerning the river's economic value to the city, said Gary Wockner, spokesman for the Save the Poudre Coalition.

More time is need to review the findings of the reports and the draft EIS, he said.

"The coalition is happy to see the city is intently studying the issue," Wockner said.

Northern Water spokesman Brian Werner said the reports had not been reviewed by district staff members as of Friday afternoon.

But issues raised by the reports are likely covered in detail by the draft EIS, which took four years and \$6 million to produce.

"We've always said there would be impacts," he said. "But there are ways to address those impacts through mitigation."

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