

Reservoir expansion fight rolls on as Horsetooth fills

Nick McGurk 5:57 p.m. MDT May 29, 2014



(Photo: Dawn Madura/The Coloradoan)

Too much water.

That's what water experts in Northern Colorado are grappling with after September flooding helped fill reservoirs — before heavy snowpack and spring moisture helped drench the Front Range.

"This is one of the best years we've had in the last decade or two," said Brian Werner with Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, which manages water delivery to a variety of Northern Colorado municipalities including Fort Collins, Loveland and Windsor.

So good, he said, that the state could send out the equivalent of five Horsetooth Reservoirs full of water to Nebraska this year because there's nowhere to store it in Colorado.

"It's helping Nebraskans, believe me, but it's water that we have rights to that we're not putting to use because there's nowhere to store it," Werner said.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Horsetooth Reservoir was 98.6 percent full Thursday.

It's why Werner said Colorado needs more reservoirs.

Glade Reservoir has been talked about for a decade — it would take water from the Poudre River and store it northwest of Fort Collins as part of the Northern Integrated Supply Project.

But not everyone believes Glade Reservoir is the answer.

"That particular reservoir would drain and destroy the Poudre River," said Gary Wockner with the group Save the Poudre, an environmental group that opposes the NISP proposal and has opposed other developments that would impact the river that flows through Fort Collins.

Wockner said more water conservation would better serve the public — not more reservoirs.

"About half of all the water would be drained out of the river, and it would just drain and destroy what's left," said Wockner.

Werner disagrees.

"It won't run dry, it can't run dry directly because of this project," he said.

Glade is years away from being finalized, Werner said. He said everybody's concerns will be taken into consideration — including concerns over water storage.

"We try to take advantage of those good years, so we can carry it over for the bad years," said Werner.

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