

Reservoir likely would hurt habitat, feds say

By Jerd Smith, Rocky Mountain News

Thursday, May 1, 2008

Habitat for the Preble's meadow jumping mouse and endangered birds, as well as some wetlands, likely would be harmed if a proposal to build a reservoir northwest of Fort Collins is approved, according to a preliminary federal report released Wednesday.

Those environmental concerns will be weighed against the soaring demand for new water supplies in fast-growing communities in northern Colorado, such as Erie, Lafayette, Fort Morgan and Dacono, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which will decide whether the reservoir should be built.

At issue is a \$406 million proposal by the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District to tap the Cache La Poudre River to build Glade Reservoir and Galeton, a smaller storage facility that would draw from the South Platte River.

Many of the problems identified in the draft environmental impact statement could be corrected by creating wetlands, restoring habitat and re-timing stream flows below the reservoirs, said Eric Wilkinson, manager of the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District.

"Obviously, those impacts have been noted," he said.

Another key concern is that the project will take more water from the Poudre, a stream that is already dry at certain times of the year.

Wilkinson said that the district already has agreed not to divert water when the river is too low, and that it would be willing to discuss releasing extra water to improve flows, though no agreements have been reached.

But the proposal has caused an outcry in the environmental community.

This month, American Rivers, an influential advocacy group, placed the Poudre on its endangered list, largely because of the proposal to build the reservoir.

And the Save The Poudre coalition says it will do everything it can to stop the project.

"Our first blush is that there is nothing (in the draft) that changes our opinion," said Gary Wockner, a spokesman for the coalition.

"This project is going to be bad for the Poudre River."

The release of the 700-page report opens a 90-day public comment period.

The state also must sign off on the plan.

Public hearings in Fort Collins and Greeley are scheduled for June.

If the project is approved, construction could begin in 2011.

smithj@RockyMountainNews.com or 303-954-5474

Hearings for Glade proposal

The Army Corps of Engineers has scheduled two public hearings to gather comments on the proposed Glade Reservoir northwest of Fort Collins:

* 6 p.m. June 17 at the Fort Collins Senior Center, 1200 Raintree Drive in Fort Collins.

* 7 p.m. June 19 in Greeley at the University of Northern Colorado's University Center, 2045 10th Ave.

Those who wish to submit comments on the proposal can do so at the hearings or by e-mailing them to Chandler J. Peter at chandler.j.peter@usace.army.mil.