
Salazar: NISP has 'Great Promise'

Support for controversial water project is guarded

BY BY ANDREW VILLEGAS,

U.S. Sen. Ken Salazar said Monday that a proposal to store more than 40,000 acre-feet of new water annually in northern Colorado has great promise in securing the region's future water needs, but the Colorado Democrat stopped short of voicing full support for the project.

Salazar spoke to nearly 50 residents and Weld County officials Monday afternoon to tout the latest farm bill, which — despite a presidential veto — was approved by Congress with an override.

The \$290 billion bill provides money for nutrition programs, farmer subsidies, disaster assistance and environmental protection for some farmlands.

Discussion at the meeting, however, was dominated by the proposed Northern Integrated Supply Project. Glade Reservoir, which would be built northwest of Fort Collins, is the centerpiece of the plan. Several members of the Weld County commissioners voiced their support for the project and urged Salazar to do the same.

"I think NISP has great promise," is as far as Salazar would go, saying he wants do his role in examining the project. Salazar added that he recognizes the need for maintaining water for Weld's agricultural future, and called for new ways of developing agreements between agriculture and municipalities to secure water for the future.

Weld commissioners Bill Jerke and Doug Rademacher both voiced their support for NISP and asked for a speedy resolution to expand reservoirs in the proposed Halligan-Seaman Project.

Calling water the "life blood" of Weld County, Rademacher said the project will keep agriculture in Weld.

Jerke said without it, he doesn't know if there will be much agriculture in Weld in 50 years.

Salazar, and the cities of Greeley and Fort Collins have asked for an additional time period for people to comment on the project before it moves forward.

Dave Dechant, a Fort Lupton farmer, said he thinks Salazar is one of the only officials that understands that NISP might have some downsides for Weld's farmers when it comes to shutting down wells and water rights. He told Salazar his concerns Monday.

"I don't see where NISP is going to help me," Dechant said, adding that he has three of 12 wells shut off and that NISP won't help him turn them back on.

"I doubt if they'll ever pump again," he said. Because of the way the farmers' well water rights will be affected by the approval of NISP, the project might "hurt wells down stream," Dechant said.



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