

## Editorial - Varying views of NISP

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Every story has two sides — at least — and the Fort Morgan City Council heard a radically different perspective on the Northern Integrated Supply Project last week.

To its credit, the council asked for it.

Gary Wockner, representing the Save The Poudre Coalition, said Fort Morgan was the first NISP participant — they number about 15 municipalities and water districts — to invite his organization to speak about the project.

NISP is a proposed water storage project that would construct two reservoirs near Fort Collins and capture water from the Cache la Poudre River to serve a number of cities and water districts. In addition to Fort Morgan and the Morgan County Quality Water District, those involved include Eaton, Erie, Fort Lupton and Windsor as well as the Central Weld County, Fort Collins-Loveland and Lefthand water districts.

These cities and districts are counting on NISP to meet their water supply needs far into the future.

The Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, which developed the Colorado-Big Thompson water project that now supplies most of Fort Morgan's water and is also spearheading the NISP plan, claims the plan would only divert water from the Poudre during peak flows, and would not deplete the river or harm the ecosystem.

Wockner begged to differ in his presentation to the city council.

Calling NISP an "ecological disaster," he said the Poudre is already depleted by other diversions and there are no excess flows. He claimed the river is frequently drained "bone dry" through downtown Fort Collins.

NISP officials, however, claim that if NISP had been in place during the unusually wet year we've had in 2009, it already would have been able to capture and store about 56,000 acre-feet of water.

Wockner also told the council that NISP would saddle its participants with "massive public debt."

Anyone who has been following the NISP project — it's currently stalled in the federal permitting process, at least partly due to objections filed by groups like Wockner's — knows that it won't come cheap.

Fort Morgan is "in" for somewhere between \$36 million and \$40 million, according to the most recent estimates from Northern Water. Those payments would be spread out over some 14 years, and to make the payments the city will have to find financing that would further spread out the financial hit over about 30 years.

But Wockner claimed the total cost of NISP would be double the \$400 million projected by NCWCD, costing the city about \$75 million, or a total of more than \$110 million when considering financing costs.

Wockner didn't say where he got his figures for the NISP cost projections, and he didn't have some answers to questions posed by council and city staff members. Obviously he has something of an ax to grind, and is not the most impartial source of information. Neither, however, is Northern Water.

What's the real truth? It's hard to say.

But we'd better find out.

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