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- Business
- Lifestyles
- Outdoors
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- Ski and Snow Report
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Waterways to make dirty list Portion of Poudre, other sites fail to meet standards

BY TREVOR HUGHES
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State water quality regulators next week will likely add portions of the Poudre and Big Thompson rivers, as well as Carter, Loveland and Boyd lakes, to a list of water bodies failing to meet clean water standards, largely because of mercury pollution from power plants.

The decision sets the stage for either deciding how to improve and clean up the water bodies or changing the standards. If regulators eventually decide the waters need to be cleaned up, millions of dollars might have to be spent upgrading water-treatment plants.

However, just developing regulations specifying how clean a water body needs to be can take up to 13 years.

"It's identifying those water bodies where water quality improvement is needed," said Paul Frohardt, administrator of the Colorado Water Quality Control Commission. "We don't know the answer to the question. We're just identifying the problem."

Carter, Boyd, Loveland and Horseshoe lakes are all expected to be added to the water quality commission's so-called 303(d) list because federal officials have warned that people should not eat fish caught there because of high levels of mercury.

Horsetooth Reservoir, already on the list for lacking oxygen in some areas, is being added again because of mercury concerns. The reservoir draws hundreds of thousands of visitors annually.

Brian Werner, a spokesman for the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, which manages the water in Horsetooth, said low levels of oxygen can be bad for fish. But he said the readings have found a lack of oxygen in one layer of water within the reservoir, and "the fish just move elsewhere."

Werner said Northern Water is working with state regulators and the Division of Wildlife to address the oxygen concerns. Northern supplies water to farms and municipalities, including Fort Collins, along the Front Range.

Cleaning up water bodies polluted with mercury is much harder because the mercury is coming from power plants, generally ones powered by burning coal.

"It's not like you can go in and do something with Horsetooth that will solve that problem," Frohardt said.

A portion of the Poudre River, from the Monroe Canal to Shields Street, is being added because of concerns about pH levels and elevated levels of copper. Copper is toxic to aquatic life, Frohardt said.

Werner said the elevated levels of copper in that section of the Poudre were likely the result of Northern's efforts to control algae in its canal connecting Horsetooth Reservoir to the river. Northern Water this year began phasing out copper sulfate, which kills algae, and is now using hydrogen peroxide, Werner said.

Too much algae in a waterbody can significantly decrease the amount of dissolved oxygen in the water, making it harder for fish to live.

Werner said Northern stopped using copper sulfate because it recognized it was contributing to the problem in the Poudre. Copper sulfate has long been used as an algae control agent by the water district, he said.

"We pay more attention to water quality now more than ever," Werner said.

Another portion of the Poudre, from Box Elder Creek east to the South Platte River, is already on the list because of elevated levels of selenium, common in agricultural runoff.

"A lot of times these are long-term challenges," Frohardt said. "It doesn't mean that nobody is going to do anything for 13 years. The high-priority water bodies are addressed much more quickly than that."

If the commission adds the local waters to the list, water quality regulators with the state will develop "total maximum daily load" standards for each body, setting out levels of permissible pollutants.

Regulators will then begin developing plans to limit the pollutants, clean up the water or change the standards.

"Sometimes you decide that the standard probably should be different," Frohardt said.

The commission, which makes its decision Monday in Denver, oversees 107,000 stream miles in Colorado.

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The portion of the Poudre River between Shields Street and Taft Hill Road will likely be added to a state list of polluted waters at a meeting Monday in Denver by the Colorado Water Quality Control Commission. This section of the river is being added to the list because of concerns about elevated copper levels.

Interested?

The Colorado Water Quality Control Commission meets at 10 a.m. Monday in the Florence Sabin Conference Room at the Department of Public Health and Environment, 4300 Cherry Creek Drive South, Denver.



V. Richard Haro/The Coloradoan

Ice covers Horsetooth Reservoir on Friday. State regulators say they are concerned about elevated levels of mercury in the Reservoir along with lower levels of oxygen.

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Comments by: **Realist** Posted: Mon Feb 11, 2008 2:47 pm
 ABCD - This article isn't about running out of energy it is about polluting our rivers by using dirty methods to get that energy.

I suppose you are going to suggest that the copper in the Poudre was natural and didn't have anything to do with humans putting it into the river. and I suppose you are going to say that the mercury in the water has nothing to do with the coal plants spewing it into the environment.

You are suggesting in your email that humans are not doing bad things to the earth. You can put your head in the sand and ignore the facts but I prefer that we actually look at this stuff and clean up the rivers and the industries. Where will you get your drinking water if nothing is done to ensure that we have clean water?

When have you heard anyone say that we will run out of energy? Maybe we will run short on oil, maybe we will need to stop burning coal because it poisons us but there is unlimited energy around us in the wind and the sun. I too believe that we will not let ourselves run out of energy, just that we will get smarter about how we get to that energy source.

What an incredibly stupid last sentence in your post. It makes you look like a totally ignorant @ss.

R

Comments by: **ABCD** Posted: Sun Feb 10, 2008 7:43 am
 First of we will never run out of energy. We as Americans won't allow that to happen. We will always find a different source.

They just found enough Natural gas in Oregon I think to last for a least a century.

There is to much doom and gloom from some of you on these pages. If you believe that we as humans are destroying the earth and you are still living on it then you are a hypocrite.

Comments by: **Water Bug 7707** Posted: Sat Feb 09, 2008 10:05 pm
 I understand that China is building coal-fired power plants as fast as they can. Starting one up every week, or something like that. This is just one of the effects of over-population.

If we as humans cannot clean up our act , than we face starvation together. 😊

And it seems to be happening faster than we ever imagined.

<http://www.livescience.com/environment/080124-agu-climate-change.html>

Comments by: **ccsmith** Posted: Sat Feb 09, 2008 5:05 pm
 "The decision sets the stage for either deciding how to improve and clean up the water bodies or changing the standards."
 Changing the standards isn't going to make the problem go away.

Comments by: **Clint** Posted: Sat Feb 09, 2008 4:36 pm
 timloco,

Thanks for your citation. I waded through it. The information within is scholarly and technical. Below is a Wyoming citation with a later publication date than yours that says WY's reserve of easily recoverable coal--50 billion tons-- (last paragraph) is 100+ years. Montana would be more.
<http://www.jacksonholestartrib.com/articles/2007/09/07/news/wyoming/1d11f4b840f2b0048725734e0082d60d>

Perhaps in the interim, technology might be developed to extract the harder to reach reserves, or, we could have a hydrogen energy system.

Please, rain and timloco, social policy is more my "expertise;" not climate and energy. Getting technical, like talking about energy level in coal type, is just something I can't do.

My real motive for my original post was to draw attention to Colorado's silly severance tax level.

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Originally published February 9, 2008

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