

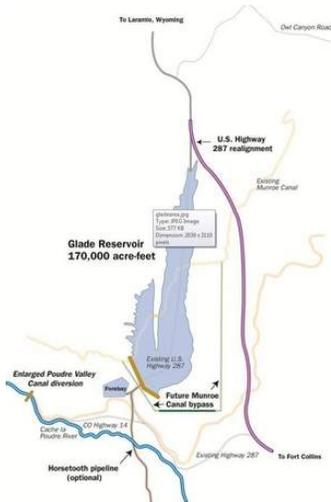
## Would Glade Reservoir have prevented Poudre flooding? Not likely, expert says

Written by Ryan Maye Handy  
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The massive reservoir that would be part of the controversial NISP water storage project could have only diverted so much water from the surging Poudre River.



### Glade Reservoir at a glance

**What it is:** The largest of two reservoirs that would be built as part of the nearly \$500 million Northern Integrated Supply Project, Glade Reservoir would have capacity to hold 170,000 acre feet of water. An acre foot is enough water to put a football field under one foot of water. **Where it stands:** NISP has been put under the microscope in a prolonged study of its potential environmental impacts being performed by the Army Corps of Engineers. The initial study was released in 2008, with a supplemental draft environmental impact statement ongoing. **What's next:** The Corps of Engineers study is expected to be released sometime in 2014, which would bring up a new round of public comment and hearings. A final decision on the project may be years off. **Learn more:** Northern Water provides more information about the proposal at <http://noconow.co/nisp>.

This map shows the location of the proposed Glade Reservoir, part of the Northern Integrated Supply Project proposed by Northern Water and its partners. / Courtesy of Northern Water

When it comes to the proposed plan to construct the Glade Reservoir northwest of Fort Collins, there are no definite answers.

Would the man-made body of water rivaling Horsetooth Reservoir in size be a blessing or a bane? A destructive blow to lower Poudre River habitat — or a gift to Northern Colorado's precious and stretched water supply?

Even after the project resolved another great unknown in September — how the Colorado Department of Transportation would re-route U.S. Highway 287 around the reservoir — it is no closer to being a reality, and no closer to being completely shut down.

But whatever the contentious Northern Integrated Supply Project might be to Northern Coloradans, at least one thing is (mostly) certain: Despite numerous claims to the contrary, the Poudre River-fed reservoir could have done little to stem the tide of the Poudre during the September floods.

“As much as I'd like to say ‘Glade would have had a big impact on the flood,’ it really wouldn't have,” said Brian Werner, spokesman for Northern Water, the water managers organizing the NISP project.

The project to build Glade Reservoir is roughly 30 years in the making, since President Ronald Reagan declared the Poudre a National Wild and Scenic River in October 1986. Then, the declaration was a

victory for environmentalists — it limited where the river could be diverted for water conservation but set aside a portion of the river, at the bottom of the canyon, for projects such as the Glade Reservoir.

In theory, the reservoir would divert water off a swollen Poudre River when flows were high, conserving it in the reservoir for dry years, such as 2012, when extra water would be desperately needed, Werner said. The system would hypothetically pull up to 1,000 cubic feet per second from the river; typically, a Poudre flow peak reaches up to 3,000 cfs, Werner said.

But during the early September floods that pushed record levels of water down the Poudre, a loss of 1,000 cfs would have done little to mitigate the water's power, Werner said. Glade's ability to help Northern Colorado would be in its ability to hold water in reserve for dry times, Werner argued, not in its capacity to control a 500-year flood event.

At the height of the flood, the Poudre was flowing through Fort Collins at more than 10,000 cfs, city officials said.

Like much about the Northern Water project, however, what Glade Reservoir could and couldn't do remains speculative.

The project stalemated after a 2008 Environmental Impact Statement — a study of potential environmental damage done by the Army Corps of Engineers — drew the ire of water activists. A supplemental report was ordered and will hopefully be completed by early 2014, Werner said.

Initial costs for the project were set at \$350 million, but over the years, the cost was brought up to \$490 million. Northern Water and its partners already have spent \$12 million on assessments of the project.

Until it gets the results of the 2014 assessment, Northern Water is checking off the necessary boxes to put the project in order — checks that mean nothing until the project gets the go-ahead. Re-routing portions of U.S. 287, which currently runs through the center of the reservoir's footprint, is one of those "checks."

For the re-route, CDOT has chosen a 7-mile "rock cut route" through a hogback ridge just north of the current intersection of Overland Trail and U.S. 287, northwest of Fort Collins. It would mean new passing lanes at Ted's Place — the intersection of U.S. 287 and Colorado Highway 14 — and would cost between \$40 million and \$50 million.

In the project's early days, the highway re-route was one of its more contentious aspects. Public meetings were held to address residents' concerns about the road changes; diverting water from the Poudre wasn't "the overriding issue" that it has become, Werner said.

"We used to joke in the early days of this project that it was a highway reclamation project, with a reservoir on the side," Werner added.

Eventually, environmental concerns about damage to the Poudre overshadowed any concerns about a new highway. Once, and if, Northern Water gets its project approved by the Army Corps of Engineers, it has a few legal battles to fight with environmental groups before its reservoir becomes a reality.

"We are mired in the environmental permitting process," Werner said.

For Gary Wockner of Save the Poudre — an activist group born of the NISP and Glade Reservoir proposal — the final decision to re-route U.S. 287 has little consequence.

“The CDOT decision is irrelevant. Because NISP would drain and destroy the Poudre River and violate the National Environmental Policy Act, Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act, the project will never get built,” he said in an email to The Coloradoan. “So, where CDOT proposes to put a road that will never be built for a project that will never be built is irrelevant.”

In the meantime, Colorado’s need for water has been temporarily relieved by September’s deluge. But catastrophic flood is not a final solution, and drought’s specter likely will haunt Colorado again.

“We need to figure out where to build additional storage,” Werner said of the need for more reservoirs to preserve what water Colorado does get. “I am totally convinced that we have to figure out where to put some of those reservoirs.”