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City: Glade effect underestimated

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Glade Reservoir's impact on the Poudre River and Fort Collins could be more significant than a \$6 million environmental study indicates, according to a preliminary city analysis of the document.

Reducing the river's flow through the city could cause widespread environmental harm as well as hurt the city's pocketbook through higher water-treatment costs, according to the analysis, which will be presented to the City Council during a Tuesday study session.

Review by city staff members and consultants of the draft Environmental Impact Statement, or EIS, for the Northern Integrated Supply Project, which would include Glade, also found inconsistencies in the document and its supporting technical reports.

The analysis is far from complete but is based on "good, hard science" and is not colored by opposition to Glade expressed by some City Council members, said Kevin Gertig, interim water resources and treatment manager for the city.

"Our job is to provide the best information we can to council so they can make decisions and guide us," Gertig said. "We have to stand by our work professionally and as city staff."

The Northern Integrated Supply Project, or NISP, would include building Glade Reservoir north of Ted's Place, Galeton Reservoir near Greeley and about 30 miles of pipeline to carry pumped water.

The project is proposed by the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District. NISP would provide water to the 15 regional communities and water districts that would fund its construction.

The city of Fort Collins would not draw water from the project. The Fort Collins-Loveland Water District, which serves portions of south Fort Collins, would.

Glade would draw water from the Poudre River using an existing canal near the mouth of Poudre Canyon. When full, the reservoir would hold 170,000 acre feet of water.

An acre foot is 325,900 gallons, enough to meet the needs of two urban families for a year.

Most of Glade's water would be drawn during times of above-average flow, primarily during the peak of the annual spring runoff. The river's flow through town would be reduced 25 to 71 percent, based on monthly averages.

Issues raised by the preliminary analysis include:

> Water in Horsetooth Reservoir, the city's main supply of drinking water, could be degraded if water from Glade is piped to Horsetooth. Dealing with increased organic carbon levels at Horsetooth would require advanced water-treatment facilities.

> The EIS omits the city's Drake Water Reclamation Facility, which treats wastewater and returns it to the river, in its modeling and reporting.

> Reducing the Poudre's flow through town would cause a more significant loss of riparian vegetation and wildlife than recognized in the EIS.

> The economic impact on the city would be greater than quantified in the document, which looks at effects to recreation but not potential development along the river.

The analysis will be used in crafting the city's comments on the draft EIS to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which released the document April 30. The Corps is taking comment on the document through July 30.

Having mistakes in a draft EIS is not unusual, especially on a project as large as NISP, said Chandler Peter, who is overseeing the project for the Corps of Engineers.

That's why government entities, organizations and individuals are encouraged to review the document and offer their comments, he said.

"This is exactly how the process is supposed to work," Peter said. "We want to hear about things we've missed and to get more information. If an issue comes up, that means we dig a little deeper and do more analysis."

Leaving out the Drake water treatment facility might be "a major error," Peter said, or a misinterpretation of information supplied by the city, Northern Water or a consultant.

Many of the environmental impacts of NISP will not be fully understood until it is built and the interplay between its diversions and others, such as taking water to irrigate farmland, becomes clear "in the field," he said.

The EIS calls for using "adaptive management" to address issues as they come up, he said.

The draft EIS took four years and \$6 million to produce. It looks at four options for the project, including taking no action. Building Glade and Galeton, which would draw water from the South Platte River, is the preferred alternative identified in the document.

The city hopes to have more time to complete its study of the EIS, Gertig said.

"We've already requested an extension on the comment period," he said. "It's an incredibly complicated document, and we want to use every minute we can to do a complete analysis and understand the impacts of this project."

Peter said a request for more time to review the EIS is "the No. 1 comment I've received so far."

A decision on extending the comment period will be made after three public hearings on the document scheduled June 16 and 17 in Fort Collins and June 19 in Greeley.
