

# Northern Colorado BUSINESS REPORT

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## Fort Collins hires D.C. lobbying firm

By Steve Porter

FORT COLLINS - Although officially neutral, the city of Fort Collins is spending more than \$30,000 on a lobbying firm to carry its message about a proposed reservoir to elected officials and regulatory agencies in Washington, D.C.

The city has hired the Denver office of national legal firm of Patton Boggs to represent its point of view on the proposed 170,000-acre-foot Glade Reservoir that, if approved, would provide 40,000 acre-feet of water annually to 15 cities and water companies.

Fort Collins, with its own resources, is not lined up to receive water from Glade but has "concerns" about the project as detailed in a draft Environmental Impact Statement prepared by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers now in the public comment phase, according to John Stokes, the city's natural resources director.

Those concerns, expressed by city staff during a June 10 city council work session, include the project's possible impacts on the Drake Water Reclamation Facility and other water infrastructure. According to staff, the draft EIS incorrectly reports the discharge location of wastewater for the South Fort Collins Sanitation District, lacks detailed modeling of reduced Poudre River flows through the city, lacks a "worst-case analysis" of water-quality impacts on Horsetooth Reservoir and fails to assess economic impacts on the city of a reduced river flow, among other concerns.

### Substantive concerns

Stokes said the city through his department - without the city yet having taken a pro or con position on the Northern Integrated Supply Project that includes Glade Reservoir - hired Patton Boggs to make sure it is heard in Washington, D.C.

"The proponents of the project are working to make contact with elected officials and the city wanted to let those officials know about substantive concerns we have about the project," he said.

Stokes said the project as currently proposed has potentially negative impacts for Fort Collins. "There are components of the project we believe could have negative impacts to the city," he said. "Part of our job is to review those impacts to see if those concerns are correctly identified and analyzed."

Stokes said the city council is scheduled to review a summary of staff comments on the draft EIS on Sept. 2 and may at that time pass a formal resolution or simply forward those comments to the Army Corps of Engineers.

The deadline for public comments on the draft EIS is Sept. 13.

An initial contract with Patton Boggs not to exceed \$21,000 will add another \$10,000 to the final bill to complete the lobbying effort.

Helping to understand

Matt Knoedler, a public policy adviser with Patton Boggs, said he and other Patton Boggs representatives are keeping Congressional officials apprised of the NISP project.

"NISP is a large, complicated project involving virtually every level of government in its approval process," he said. "Where we help is to understand the role of Congress in a project like this."

Stokes said the lobbying effort "really is educational in nature" and not intended to persuade Colorado's elected delegation one way or the other about the project.

"We haven't asked them to take any position but just be aware of our position when they are approached by other entities," he said, noting that the project's main proponent - Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District - has mounted a "quite extensive" lobbying effort of its own.

But Brian Werner, NCWCD spokesman, denied that characterization of its ongoing D.C. lobbying on a variety of district water issues. "In the last year we've been back there twice and NISP was just one part of what we've talked about," he said.

"We've talked about NISP maybe two times in the last 12 months, so you can decide if that's significant."

Werner said he was surprised to hear the city had hired a lobbying firm. "I guess I am, given that their public stance is neutral," he said.

Although the city of Fort Collins has ongoing lobbying efforts at the state level when the Colorado legislature is in session, hiring a D.C. lobbyist is not a common occurrence.

Wendy Williams, assistant city manager, said she knew of only one other time that the city hired a lobbyist to represent its interest in Washington. In 2002, the city spent about \$156,000 to urge legislators to include funding in a transportation bill for design of the Mason Corridor and the construction of the Fort Collins Transit Center on the Colorado State University campus.

Williams said with the Mason Corridor planning moving forward and the recent completion of the transit center, the money was well spent.