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Publish Date: 9/11/2008

Healthy Rivers plan will be sent to Army Corps of Engineers

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Loveland Reporter-Herald

FORT COLLINS — A band of residents who want to prevent Glade Reservoir believe 15 cities and water districts can find water for future growth from conservation and fallowing instead of from the “already stressed” Poudre River.

The Save the Poudre Coalition — a group of thousands of area residents including scientists, economists and land stewards, many with doctoral degrees — released its own alternative Wednesday to the reservoir Northern Water wants to build northwest of Fort Collins.



Gary Wockner answers a question from an audience member Wednesday evening at the Lincoln Center in Fort Collins during a public meeting put on by the Save the Poudre Coalition regarding the proposed Glade Reservoir north of Fort Collins. Reporter-Herald/Steve Stoner

“We’re doing this for the river,” said Gary Wockner, leader of the Save the Poudre Coalition. “It has been done in the past for the river. It’ll be done in the future for the river. It’s a beautiful river.”

Today, members will send their Healthy Rivers Alternative, with hundreds of pages of documentation and scientific findings and more than 5,000 signatures on a petition, to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to ask the decision makers to discard their current environmental evaluation and start over.

The Healthy Rivers plan is economically and environmentally viable, Wockner said, showing multiple graphs that depicted cost, conservation and water use.

The new plan is based on numbers that Save the Poudre members recalculated because they believe the environmental impact statement for Glade Reservoir relies on flawed population growth estimates and incorrect costs.

Based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau and State Demography Office, plus data that shows increasing home foreclosures and decreasing building permits, the coalition says the communities that would draw water from Glade will actually grow by 117,000 fewer people than reported in the environmental impact statement.

Also, based on those communities’ water use compared to Fort Collins’ water use, the coalition members believe residents could use less water, filling some of the need.

The rest of the water could be leased from farmers or obtained by a rotational fallowing program, according to Wockner, who said such techniques are successful in California and other states.

Through rotational fallowing, about 100 farmers would come together and each agree to farm their land nine of every 10 years; on the off year, their irrigation water would be leased to cities. The

farmers get paid, the land gets a one-year rest and the cities get water.

This following plan would cost \$449 million over four years, higher than the cost Northern Water projects for Glade Reservoir.

However, Wockner said the coalition believes the water district's estimate is low. Glade's opponents crunched numbers based on inflation and including finance charges, and claim the reservoir project would actually cost closer to \$1 billion — a number more than twice the \$426 million that Northern Water and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers report the project would cost.

The Army Corps of Engineers is taking comments on its environmental assessment of Glade Reservoir through Saturday.

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