

## Soapbox: Honest look at damaging NISP is necessary

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On Oct. 25 the Coloradoan reported on an “independent” poll done for the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, or Northern, claiming widespread support for the proposed Northern Integrated Supply Project, or NISP, which includes the extremely damaging and controversial Glade and Galetton reservoirs.

Save The Poudre: Poudre Waterkeeper has serious concerns about a number of misleading aspects to this story, and we'd like to address some of them in this forum.

The poll in question was anything but “independent.” It was, in fact, a so-called push poll done by the public relations firm Ciruli and Associates, financed by NISP supporters. At one point, the poll claimed there was “excess” water in the Poudre River, then it asked whether you supported the NISP project, which would use that water. The question and the lead-in were biased in favor of “yes” answers. No background information was provided regarding the controversial nature of the project, the numerous scientific studies contesting claims about “excess” water in the Poudre, or the damage NISP would cause.

The poll was designed to provide the public relations outcome Northern and NISP supporters desired from the start. We expect more from government agencies such as Northern, which is funded through property taxes and heavily involved in Colorado water management. This poll was misleading propaganda intended to bolster a flagging and highly controversial project.

The poll also asked: “Do you believe 10 years is sufficient time for study or do you believe additional time for study is required?” Environmental impact analysis is done to conduct scientific research to understand and fully disclose the likely impacts of a project. Effective research takes time, especially when the first time around the job is botched. That is what happened in the first round of studies. The draft environmental impact statement released in 2008 was severely roundly criticized by the scientific community — labeled “incompetent” by some of the most respected scientists in the field — and was given the equivalent of a failing grade in a peer review by other several federal agencies. The Corps of Engineers had no choice but to go back and do it all over again, but better. For anyone to claim now that the process is taking too long is disingenuous.

The first step Save The Poudre took in the NISP EIS process was to collaborate on an alternative water supply plan we could say yes to. We called it the Healthy Rivers Alternative, and it was recently updated by Western Resource Advocates ([www.westernresourceadvocates.org/water/nisp.php](http://www.westernresourceadvocates.org/water/nisp.php)). It uses reliable and up-to-date population data and projections from the State Demographer's Office and proposes we implement the water conservation strategies endorsed by the Colorado Water Conservation Board in the Statewide Water Supply Initiative. It incorporates collaboration between agriculture and local communities to reduce the permanent dry-up of ag land. It is better, faster and cheaper than NISP by including a diverse portfolio of water supply instead of a giant river-wrecking reservoir. It is a phased approach; it is cooperative instead of controversial; it protects our rivers; and we believe it is the kind of progressive approach Colorado needs.

Colorado citizens expect — and the law demands — valid research, full disclosure and an honest assessment of the likely impacts of water projects that will harm our rivers. This recent push poll seems to

indicate that Northern and the NISP proponents view the process as just a public relations hurdle, rather than a critical, fundamental step in assessing the future of the Poudre River. Nothing less will do than a fully transparent process and an honest accounting of the facts.

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