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Keep river beautiful for our kids

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While growing up, I was outdoors as much as possible, spending most of my free time prowling natural areas, especially streams and rivers.

Moving waters were magnetic, providing indelible, valid biological education. Streams had fishes, frogs, turtles and snakes. I lay on creek banks watching lovely trout suspended in transparent water. I saw a frog being swallowed by a garter snake and learned the most fundamental truth of biology - life lives on life. Moving waters cultivated a fascination with nature and motivated me to study and teach about it for most of my life. Today, rivers such as the Poudre restore my well-being.

In June, my daughter gave birth to my grandson, Jensen. Like many grandfathers, I began imagining outings Jensen and I would have. I especially want to share with Jensen the joy of fishing for trout in the Poudre near my home. The river, from LaPorte through Fort Collins, is also a real-life biology laboratory conveying the beauty and spirituality of nature as well as its facts of life. Best of all, it's right here, not a tank of gas away, and it's an uplifting part of daily life for many.

In this urban setting, Jensen could see ospreys and kingfishers pursuing their prey, watch beavers and foxes, and feel the chilly water on his feet while chasing a frog or flipping rocks in search of crayfish. He could see mayfly and caddis hatches in summer and deer tracks in the winter snow. Jensen could do all these things within a bicycle ride from his house or mine.

For children, our river is a vital antidote to hypnotic, stunting, electronic entertainment. Experiencing natural places is critical to full psychological development and health. If you need convincing, read Richard Louv's "Last Child in the Woods."

Would Glade Reservoir diversions push the Poudre over a threshold of warming, with less oxygen and more silt to imperil its trout? The NISP Draft Environmental Impact Statement and technical reports contain repeated admissions that effects of reduced flows on the river's water, structure and wildlife are difficult to predict, but it's likely that water quality would be degraded. The stream channel would be narrowed, vegetated out of view and less navigable. After poring over these technical reports, I find the bottom line rather simple: Diversions for Glade would reduce Poudre flows most of the time and under most conditions. The consequences would likely be bad for the river and those who value it.

Some argue that building Glade is the most visionary and prudent course. I feel that this argument is shortsighted and lacks wisdom about future needs for quality of life and well-being. Although it will be constrained by a new, grim economic climate, growth here is likely. Consequently, protecting our natural assets is increasingly important. We'll doubtless have an abundance of shopping malls and cloned retail outlets, but we'll never have more rivers than we do today. I fear Glade Reservoir would make Jensen's home river a shadow of what it is now - just as he was beginning to know it. A mud-ringed impoundment would be a sad substitute for the rich corridor of life that we have along the flowing Poudre.