

Morphing project vows cure for all water woes

MARK EASTER OF FORT COLLINS • JUNE 24, 2010

In a June 11 news release, the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District (Northern) speculated that if the NISP/Glade project had been built already it could have reduced recent flooding on the Poudre and South Platte Rivers.

NISP/Glade project has morphed into a new brand of snake oil, promising to cure all of our water ills, flooding included. Northern has a tendency to tout every meteorological, environmental and economic whim and trend as a reason to Build NISP/Glade and destroy the Cache la Poudre River. Got drought? Build NISP. Got flooding? Build NISP. Expecting climate change? Build NISP. But when one looks carefully at the facts behind the issues, the case for NISP unravels, as is the situation once again.

NISP would actually increase flooding risk below Poudre Canyon. Case in point: Greeley and the Corps of Engineers are preparing to spend between \$12 million and \$16 million of taxpayer money to dredge the Poudre River to reduce flooding risk. Why? Because nearly two-thirds of the Poudre River's flows have already been stripped from the river by upstream dams and diversions. The river through Greeley no longer has the flow level and energy needed to flush sediment out of its way. Every year, the river perches inches higher within its banks as sediment builds up in the streambed. NISP/Glade would dramatically worsen that problem by taking away the last of the regular peak flows.

In extraordinary years like this one, there would be no place for the river to go but out of the banks and into the streets - and living rooms - of Bellevue, LaPorte, Fort Collins, Windsor and Greeley. All of these communities would be locked into long-term, costly flood-control programs that Greeley now confronts if NISP/Glade is built. Why not let the river do that work for us by protecting peak flows? NISP/Glade is not a flood-control project. Flood control is nowhere in the project's objectives. Ask any dam engineer about the differences between water storage and flood-control projects, and he or she will say they are engineered very differently. Northern's recent claims about NISP/Glade and flood control are like most others they have made - only true in a very narrow context. This project is chock full of irony, and it presents an interesting conundrum - Greeley's recent flooding problems are caused by past dam and diversion projects coupled with poor land-use decisions. Building another dam is like a physician prescribing a larger belt and bigger pants to a patient with a weight control problem.

NISP/Glade would turn the Cache la Poudre River into a depleted, stinking ditch. Follow the money: Nearly all of the so-called benefits of the project would go south to Denver suburbs, leaving the rest of us to deal with the expensive, ugly mess it would leave behind. The proposal for NISP/Glade is already on life support, and Northern seems prepared to do or say anything to resuscitate it. They just want to build a dam, period; the rest of us be damned.

Mark Easter of Fort Collins is chairman of Save the Poudre: Poudre Waterkeeper.