



June 26, 2008

Seek open, honest EIS process

Did you catch the "Glade Parade" last week? A veritable stampede of mostly Weld and Boulder county water buffaloes thundered into town for two hearings held by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to take public input about the Northern Integrated Supply Project, which includes Glade Reservoir.

The project applicants made sure to round up supporting testimony from what seemed like every single mayor, town council member, town engineer, legislator, former legislator and ditch rider from all the thirsty towns lassoed into NISP.

These folks seemed nice enough (some of them probably even saw the Poudre while it still resembled a river), but what really impressed me was their capacity for self delusion, especially regarding the conflicts between agriculture and urbanization.

NISP proponents made a lot of hay (pun intended) about the dire and oft-repeated warning that water now irrigating 69,000 acres of farmland will be diverted to urban use if the project isn't built. Therefore, pushing the project must mean NISP's 15 partners are farm-friendly, right? Wrong. At their planned growth and density, these small towns and rural districts will dewater, pave over and otherwise inhibit agriculture on a lot more land than that over the next 20 years to accommodate 190,000 more people.

Unfortunately, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement is silent on this point, claiming that water projects have no effect on the magnitude of future development. Pro-NISP spokespeople at the hearings referred often to both their accelerated growth and their helplessness to do anything about it. Makes me wonder if while driving back home on Interstate 25 they knew enough to ease up on the gas pedal when the traffic ahead of them slowed down.

But the real travesty is that beyond 20 years from now, after all the NISP water is fully utilized, these towns intend to continue growing. By 2050, they project having 115,000 more people than their existing water supply plus NISP can handle. Where will that water come from - could it be from dewatered farmland?

Again, the DEIS is silent on this point, and it hardly seems proper or even legal. The adverse impact (dried up farmland) is only tied to the "no-action" alternative; but even if Glade is built, the very same impact will start happening less than 15 years after its completion.

Here's another fascinating tidbit, not from the DEIS itself, but buried in its nearly impenetrable 2,500 pages of supporting documentation: In just 15 years (1987-2002), Weld, Larimer and Boulder counties lost 372,000 acres of farmland to growth and development. That's more than five times the acreage Glade would temporarily "save."

This is like a New Orleanean asking what will happen in a Category 3 hurricane if the Army Corps doesn't fix the city's levees. The response: "massive flooding will occur." So the New Orleanean asks what will happen if the levees are fixed. Answer: "massive flooding will still occur because the levees aren't designed to withstand such a storm."

For Northern Colorado agriculture, the massive urbanization enabled by NISP is a slow-motion

hurricane from which there is no recovery. Please go to SaveThePoudre.org, and find out what you can do to demand an EIS process that openly and honestly addresses what this project means for the future of our river and our region.
