
200 Rally for northern Front Range reservoir project

*By Monte Whaley
The Denver Post*

ERIE — About 200 farmers, ranchers and local officials rallied Thursday for a massive water-storage project they say will save small towns and family farms along the northern Front Range.

At one point, Weld County Commissioner Sean Conway led the throng with shouts of “NISP now” before sending them out to spread the gospel of the Northern Integrated Supply Project.

“You go and send that message about how much we need this,” Conway said, rallying the troops from inside a barn at Anderson Farms, northwest of Erie.

NISP calls for the Cache La Poudre River to be diverted during high-flow periods to fill two new reservoirs, Glade Reservoir northwest of Fort Collins and Galetton Reservoir east of Ault. Current estimates put a \$490 million price tag on the project.

Proponents say the 15 cities and water districts that are paying for and would get water from NISP expect to see their populations double in the next 20 to 40 years.

Without NISP, they say, cities would continue to buy up agricultural water rights, sucking dry some of the top food-producing farms and ranches in the state.

“Little farms and communities are going to start drying up and disappearing,” said state Sen. Mary Hodge, D-Brighton. “Meanwhile, our population will continue to grow.

“It’s our water,” she said, “and we can’t let it get away from us.”

The go-ahead for NISP rests largely in the hands of the Army Corps of Engineers, which released a draft environmental-impact statement for the project in 2008.

But the corps decided to do a supplemental study after critics said the original failed to answer critical questions, including the extent of the environmental damage the dams may cause.

The supplemental report should be completed and released by next summer, said Brian Werner, spokesman for the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District.

Don Korrey — who works 800 acres of corn and alfalfa northeast

Weld County farmer Keith Clay says the Pledge of Allegiance during an agricultural rally supporting the Northern Integrated Supply Project on Thursday at Anderson Farms, outside Erie. (Craig F. Walker, The Denver Post)of Sterling — said NISP is desperately needed to preserve water that otherwise would flow out of the plains and into cities.

“Any storage anywhere will help farmers everywhere,” Korrey said. “It’s obvious cities are asking for more water rights, and if they keep doing that, our water will be depleted and their goes our livelihoods.”

However, critics say NISP would dangerously deplete the Poudre River, wreck habitats in and near the river, and fuel rapid growth that would destroy most northern Front Range farms, said Gary Wockner, director of Save the Poudre.

“The water that would be stored in the Glade Reservoir and is now used to grow crops will be used to flush toilets in the suburbs,” Wockner said.

Save the Poudre is also looking at the possibility of taking action against NISP supporters for legal and trademark infringements, Wockner said.

The water conservancy district produced bumper stickers that say: “Save the Poudre: Store it in Glade.”

“We’ve been so successful at stopping their project, they now are desperately resorting to stealing our name,” Wockner said. “It’s sad and stupid.”

Werner said the bumper stickers are intended to let people know NISP has plenty of backers.

“Some people don’t realize there is a whole other point of view out there,” he said.

Monte Whaley: 720-929-0907 or mwhaley@denverpost.com