

Farm advocates push for Glade project

By Tom Hacker

Loveland Reporter-Herald

ERIE — Politicians outnumbered farmers in Erie on Thursday morning for a “Farmers for NISP” rally in support of the Northern Integrated Supply Project, the largest regional water storage and distribution proposal in 60 years.

The Anderson Farm, once a working farm but now an entertainment and education venue, hosted the event organized by the Colorado Farm Bureau and the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, the architect of the project.

“People say there is a crisis coming,” former Colorado Agriculture Commissioner Don Ament said in warming up the crowd of about 200. “I’m here to tell you the crisis is already here.”

Farmers in Northern Colorado have said since the time the project was unveiled six years ago that it is the only thing standing between their livelihoods and the water needs of growing Front Range communities.

The linchpin of the project, the proposed Glade Reservoir north of Fort Collins, would siphon Poudre River flow to provide 170,000 acre-feet of storage, slightly more than Horsetooth Reservoir offers.

Horsetooth is the prime storage reservoir for the Colorado-Big Thompson project, the region’s last major water supply project.

Water stored in Glade would flow through a maze of ditches and pipelines to supply water to 11 towns and cities and four water districts that would own the project.

Opponents, led by the conservation group Friends of the Poudre, say the project would drop Poudre flow levels so low that water quality and wildlife habitat would be severely affected. They use the slogan “Save the Poudre” to make their point.

But the mantra Thursday was “Save the Poudre, Store it in Glade,” with banners carrying the message hoisted at the Anderson Farm and bumper stickers available for attendees to take with them.

A parade of speakers at the barbecue event mostly made the same points: Population growth would mean committing a finite regional water supply to cities and towns, incrementally drying up irrigated farms.

Throughout the past decade, cities from well outside the region have bought agricultural water rights from willing sellers, a process that’s described in the phrase “buy and dry.”

“In the next 20 years, we’ve got another million people coming to this region,” Weld County Rep. Glenn Vaad, R-Mead, said. “Without this project, the water they’ll need can only come from one source, and that’s not a pretty picture.”

Officials from cities and towns among the project’s would-be owners were most numerous among the politicians who made the trip to Erie.

Frederick Mayor Eric Doering said reliable water supplies transcend the needs of farmers and made it possible for southern Weld County to attract employers such as Abound Solar, UQM Technologies and Vestas Wind Systems.

“It’s not just farmers for NISP. It’s municipalities for NISP,” Doering said. “Let’s make this work. Let’s have a good debate about it, but let’s help those who might be opposed to this know that it’s absolutely essential.”

Larry Burkhardt, president of the Weld County economic development agency Upstate Colorado, told the gathering that NISP was as much about sustaining the economy as it was about growing crops.

“I’m not a farmer, and I’m not a politician,” Burkhardt said. “This is a win for communities. It’s a win for agriculture. It’s win for jobs, and jobs are more important than anything.”

Water Project’s Owners

Eleven towns and cities and four water utilities have made financial commitments for shares of the Northern Integrated Supply Project, ranging from 1,000 acre-feet to 6,500 acre-feet annually.

An acre-foot of water is sufficient to meet the needs of a household of four for a year.

Municipalities include Windsor, Erie, Evans, Fort Lupton, Fort Morgan, Eaton, Severance, Lafayette, Firestone, Frederick and Dacono.

Water providers are the Forth Collins Loveland Water District, the Left Hand Water District, the Central Weld County Water District and Morgan County Quality Water.

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