

## Reporter-Herald

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By Eric Brown

### Area farmers report NISP will not hurt region's ag industry

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To Lynn Fagerberg, it comes as a relief.

The Larimer County Agricultural Advisory Board's report released this past week — which generally stated that the proposed Northern Irrigated Supply Project would not negatively affect the region's agriculture industry, disputing claims made in another report earlier this year — was a view already shared by the Eaton area producer of onions and other crops.

But Fagerberg, who believes that more water storage is necessary for the future of the region's agriculture industry, said he believes the facts and myths regarding the proposed \$500 million storage endeavor must be separated, and he's glad to hear fellow farmers are taking measures to do so.

“The people who will be affected, those who know the facts, need to step up,” he said. “That's when I think people will listen.”

The Larimer County Agricultural Advisory Board, 14 farmers who advise the Larimer County commissioners on agricultural issues, told commissioners this week they believe NISP's proposed Glade and Galeton reservoirs would not dry up farmland — it would, in fact, take pressure off farmers' water supplies and rights. The farmers also said the project would not harm productive crops with increased salinity, going against claims made by the Save the Poudre Coalition in its own report released in April.

In the main portion of its report to commissioners last week, the Agricultural Advisory Board responded to five specific claims made in the release from the Save the Poudre Coalition — which is a group composed of 20 environmental organizations that has opposed NISP since the project began taking shape in 2004.

Those claims were:

» NISP would accelerate buy-up and subdivision of irrigated farms in northern Colorado.

»It would accelerate salinization of productive crop lands.

»It would end nearly all “free water” diversion opportunities and impact many existing water users.

»It would submerge and divide productive ag land.

»And, the “initial fill” and ongoing diversions into the two reservoirs are likely to come from northern Colorado and Western Slope farm water.

In its response, the Agriculture Advisory Board disagreed with those statements, couldn't find evidence to support some claims and noted that other implications made by the Save the Poudre Coalition were inaccurate.

“It’s good to see that the people who live and breathe agriculture are the ones now trying to put out the information,” said Fagerberg, who serves on the board of directors for the Larimer and Weld Irrigation and the Larimer and Weld Reservoir companies. He noted that about 90 percent of the ag producers with whom he talks are in favor of NISP. “We don’t need misinformation put out there.

“What we probably need to get the ball rolling faster is more people — the ones who will truly be affected by NISP — to come forward and get the facts out.”

Getting the truth out was the intention of Larimer commissioners when it asked its Agriculture Advisory Board — in existence since 1998 — to research the effects NISP would have on agriculture. Commissioners Steve Johnson and Tom Donnelly said they wanted to look into claims made in the Save the Poudre Coalition’s “The Farm Facts About NISP” report released in the spring.

“It just seemed like we needed to get some perspective from actual farmers — the people whose livelihoods were on the line with all of this,” said Johnson, who added that the Agriculture Advisory Board began working on its report quickly after Save the Poudre released its report. “We believed we would have a better idea of the impacts on agriculture if we heard it from the farmers.”

During the six months the advisory board worked on its report, efforts included holding special meetings, one in which presentations were given by representatives of both the Save the Poudre Coalition and the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District — the public agency that’s spearheading NISP efforts.

“It was an effort the group took very seriously,” said Val Manning, one of the three advisory board members who presented the report to commissioners. “Our conclusion wasn’t that NISP is the cure-all for northern Colorado’s water problems. We just wanted to take a look at its effects on agriculture and make sure the truth was out there.”

Although the bulk of the advisory board’s report disputed claims made earlier in the year by the Save the Poudre Coalition, the board’s report also included a “minority opinion” in which some members questioned language used in the advisory board’s conclusions, questioned some of research materials that supported the advisory board’s decision, and also agreed with some statements made by the Save the Poudre Coalition in its “Farm Facts” report.

“This report by the Agriculture Advisory Board is yet another example of how extremely controversial the topic is and how it has divided the agricultural community,” said Gary Wockner, an ecological scientist, activist and writer from Fort Collins who serves as the executive director and spokesman for the Save the Poudre Coalition, which he also co-founded. “Some farmers still believe that NISP could dry up farms, lead to less crop productivity, force bigger public debt and faster farm subdivision, use Western Slope Colorado River water, and impact farmers’ water rights.”

In addition to the conservation group’s concerns about agriculture, it also claims NISP would further deplete the Poudre River, hurting wildlife, fisheries, forests and recreational use along the river in Fort Collins — a city that’s invested vast amounts of money into open spaces along the river.

Wockner said he believes that when the federal government releases an Environmental Impact Statement on NISP — for which a date is still uncertain — the science will prove that the Save the Poudre Coalition has been right all along.

But for now, farmers in Larimer and Weld counties and elsewhere who believe more storage is one of the keys for future water security — farmers like Fagerberg, as well as Frank Eckhardt from La Salle — will celebrate

what is seemingly a victory for their cause.

“It’s good to see this support,” Eckhardt said of hearing about the Larimer County Agriculture Advisory Board’s report. “We need more reservoirs ... and it’s good to see that farmers are speaking up about it.”

### **NISP at A Glance**

The Northern Irrigation Supply Project is a proposed regional water project, coordinated by the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, with the goal of providing about 40,000 acre-feet of new water supply annually to 15 municipalities or water districts in northern Colorado. Among the participants are the cities of Eaton, Evans, Windsor and Severance and the Central Weld County and Fort Collins-Loveland water districts.

The purpose of the project is to avoid expected shortfalls in water supply for a demand that’s expected to increase rapidly as the region’s population grows, while also preventing more water than necessary flowing out of the state and preventing municipalities from buying water rights from farmers in order to meet their needs.

The 15 participants have spent about \$10 million during the past seven years to plan and analyze the endeavor. There is no guarantee that NISP — a project that includes the construction of two new reservoirs in northern Colorado — will ever take shape. The federal government continues to analyze the Environmental Impact Statement.

It’s the largest water-storage project in northern Colorado since the Colorado-Big Thompson Project was built between 1937 and 1957. If approved by the federal government, the project could take four to eight years to complete.

The two new reservoirs:

- » The Glade Reservoir would be located northwest of Fort Collins and north of Horsetooth Reservoir and could store 170,000 acre-feet of water, making it the largest reservoir in northern Colorado. The water to fill Glade Reservoir would be diverted from the Poudre River using the existing Poudre Valley Canal.
  - » The Galeton Reservoir would be located east of Ault and northeast of Greeley and hold about 40,000 acre-feet of water. The water would be diverted from the South Platte River downstream from Greeley. Galeton water would be delivered to two agricultural irrigation companies — the New Cache La Poudre Irrigating Company in Lucerne and the Larimer and Weld Irrigation Company in Eaton — in exchange for Poudre River water they currently use.
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