

Coloradoan.com

Coloradoan.com: October 25, 2011

By Kevin Duggan

Report: Glade's impact not as bad as predicted

Glade Reservoir and the controversial Northern Integrated Supply Project may not impact regional agriculture as severely as opponents of the project claim, according to a county-appointed board.

A memo by the Larimer County Agricultural Advisory Board states NISP would not necessarily accelerate the selling and subdivision of farms to meet the water needs of growing cities as predicted in a study released earlier this year by Save the Poudre, which opposes the project.

"The need for NISP is the result of growth, which has occurred or will occur, rather than NISP being a cause of that growth," Val Manning, chair of the advisory board told the county commissioners Tuesday.

"The urbanization of the area is going to happen," she said. "And it is important to have these water projects that will help to keep agricultural water available and yet take care of the water that's needed for urban growth."

The board also found construction of Glade Reservoir north of Ted's Place would not take significant agricultural land out of production because the property already is owned by Northern Water, which has proposed building NISP.

There's no evidence the project would increase salinity levels in Weld County fields and reduce crop productivity as stated in Save the Poudre's report, "The Farm Facts about NISP," the board stated.

Gary Wockner, executive director of Save the Poudre, stated in an email to the Coloradoan that the findings in "Farm Facts" are still being widely read and discussed and alternatives to the massive project should be pursued.

"NISP is extremely controversial and has divided the agricultural community. Some farmers believe that NISP will dry up farms, reduce yields on farms and intensify water conflicts with farmers," he said.

The board, which advises the county commissioners on agricultural issues, was asked to study the impact of NISP by the commissioners in reaction to the Save the Poudre report.

The board met with proponents and opponents of the project and appointed a subcommittee to review information presented by both sides, said Linda Hoffmann, director of planning for the county.

The majority of the 14-member board supported the final findings, although a minority report by members George Wallace and Jon Slutsky provided additional comments.

The board's analysis questioned Save the Poudre's contention that the amount of "free water" available for diversion during years of high flow would be eliminated by NISP because water rights for the project are junior to other claims on the river's water.

Wallace told the commissioners some downstream farmers have become accustomed to using "free" water for production during years of high flow and they would be affected by reduced availability.

"It depends on whether you see this as a Larimer County issue or a regional agricultural issue," he said.

NISP would draw water from the Poudre River during periods of high flow for storage in Glade Reservoir, which would be built north of Ted's Place, and Galeton Reservoir near Greeley.

The water would be used to meet the needs of growing communities in Larimer, Boulder, Weld and Morgan counties. Critics say those needs could be met through other means, such as conservation.

NISP has been in the works for many years. A revised environmental impact statement on the project is expected to be released by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 2013.

The project would provide municipalities with another source of water so they would not have to pursue agricultural water to meet their needs, Manning said.