

Backers of Northern Colorado dam project deny delay

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By Monte Whaley

Proponents of a massive dam-building project planned for northern Colorado dismiss claims the proposal is being hampered by delays because of environmental problems.

In fact, the Northern Integrated Supply Project, or NISP, is moving along as expected with the state's communities and governor hoping it will get done sooner rather than later, said Brian Werner, spokesman for Northern Water, also known as the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District.

Werner said a recent decision by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to delay issuing its environmental impact statement for at least another year — sometime in fall 2013 — is not a sign the project is in trouble.

"We are at the mercy of the process, we've never been tied to a deadline," Werner said

The Army Corps delivered its latest assessment in a letter to Gov. John Hickenlooper, who wanted to know when the impact statement would be completed. That's a sign that Hickenlooper and the cities and towns that would benefit from NISP want the project done.

"They know how important this is to Colorado," Werner said.

But the environmental group, Save The Poudre, says the delays that have hampered NISP are all indications the project is stalled because of the woes it will cause the Cache La Poudre River.

"This is great news for the Poudre River," said Gary Wockner, director of Save The Poudre. "The river-destroying project has been delayed for five years with no end in sight."

Northern Water is a chief proponent of NISP, which calls for the Cache La Poudre to be diverted during high-flow periods to fill two proposed reservoirs, Glade Reservoir northwest of Fort Collins and Galenton Reservoir east of Ault.

The latest cost of the project is at \$490 million.

At least 15 northern Colorado water providers also back NISP, believing it will sustain them during times of drought.

But Save the Poudre claims NISP will ultimately destroy the river. As proof, Wockner points to the Army Corps' letter that says: "The size of the proposals, types of analysis, and the amount of interest they have generated have resulted in substantial reviews."

However, a comprehensive review of NISP was expected to attract a similar review by the Corps, Werner said.

"We've never been held to a hard and fast deadline," he said. "What I am hearing from the 15 communities and the governor, is 'Hey, let's get this thing done.' "