

Carbon Valley Voices: NISP Helps Build Northern Colorado's Future

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By Chad Auer, Mayor of Firestone

As the mayor of one of Colorado's fastest growing communities, I know firsthand the challenges related to sustainability. Navigating the waters of economic development, regional master planning and resource stewardship is complex and often riddled with peril. Too often, leaders are blown off course by disingenuous activists, amplified emotions and deceitful propaganda. Success requires broad vision, discernment and collaboration.

Water storage is one of the most important issues facing Colorado. Numerous reports, most notably those by the Statewide Water Supply Initiative, underscore that Colorado is in dire need of expanded storage facilities. By 2050, Colorado's population is projected to double, agricultural demands will increase and energy demands will grow. Experts tell us this increased demand will require between 600,000 and 1 million more acre-feet of water per year. Expanding Colorado's water storage capacity is imperative.

To meet this challenge, communities across the northern Front Range are collaborating on the Northern Integrated Supply Project to add to the state's water storage capacity. By building an environmentally sound reservoir, NISP will supply water to one of the fastest growing regions in Colorado. Unlike other projects, NISP does not place a dam on the main river. In fact, the reservoir is miles off stream and will be filled by diverting water from the Poudre River only during peak flows, thereby preserving the river.

Additionally, NISP will protect our state's agricultural economy by reducing the push for cities and towns to purchase farmers' water rights -- a devastating practice known as "buy and dry." Agriculture is critical to a thriving Colorado and we need to do what it takes to support local producers.

Another important feature of NISP is that Colorado's water will be used here, rather than flow out of state. The project is a regional solution, which is far better economically and environmentally than many individual projects. Additionally, the reservoir will provide an economic boon by attracting anglers, boaters and other recreationalists to the region.

Just as with building Denver International Airport, the Colorado-Big Thompson Project or Horsetooth Reservoir, NISP has its naysayers. Armed with a knack for clever deception, an "occupy NISP" group aspires to thwart the project. Their obstructionist tactics cost taxpayers millions of dollars and threaten to deprive Colorado of its future.

Thankfully, the vast majority of Coloradans have seen through the smoke and realize that NISP is another addition to a long list of great advancements in our state's history.

NISP participants understand that expanding water storage is just one element of the long-term solution. Water conservation and responsible use work hand in hand with large-scale storage projects. To that end, participating communities, through concentrated conservation initiatives, have reduced consumption by nearly one-third. Further, Firestone was among the first communities in the state to enact a drought mitigation plan that further demonstrates our commitment to responsible resource management.

In addition to my role as mayor, I have the honor of working with public school leaders around our state. We all know that Colorado's schools are full of children who will one day pursue their version of the American dream. By building NISP, we give them a chance to do so here in Colorado.

I urge you to join us in providing water for people, protecting our farms and supporting Colorado's future.

Chad Auer is mayor of Firestone.