

The importance of NISP to Northern Colorado

Boulder Daily Camera

May 27, 2012

By Bob Juhl, Joseph A. Wilson and Carolyn Cutler

As water providers to a significant portion of eastern Boulder County, we would like to share some important facts about the Northern Integrated Supply Project.

NISP is a proposed water storage and distribution project that will supply 15 Northern Front Range water partners with 40,000 acre feet of new, reliable water supplies each year. NISP will allow us to store water currently leaving the state in wet years and make it available in dry years like this year.

Collectively, the NISP participants are taking a lead in water conservation by reducing their water usage by more than 30 percent in the past 20 years. Yet, the need for future water storage is real. We do understand the need to conserve but realize we must also increase our storage capacity.

Erie and Lafayette and the Left Hand Water District, which serves Eastern Boulder County, have spent the past decade studying the best methods to ensure our ability to access enough water to meet our future dry year needs. Together with 12 regional water providers, we determined that NISP is our best option from more than 200 options studied. NISP is not only the most environmentally sensitive project, but also the best solution from an economic standpoint.

Some believe the region will be fine without NISP. We wholeheartedly disagree. In fact, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement states clearly that if NISP is not built, one of the consequences will be the elimination of 100 square miles of irrigated farmland in Northern Colorado because communities will have to purchase necessary water supplies from farmers. One of NISP's goals is to keep water on farms to ensure their continued operation.

Northern Colorado will continue to grow regardless of whether NISP is built or not. Colorado needs to keep available water supplies in the state for its citizens. From 2009 to 2011 Colorado saw more than 1.4 million acre feet of water leave the state to Nebraska over and above what is required. That's enough water to supply the entire Front Range of Colorado with water for a year.

With NISP in place we could have stored some of that precious water and filled Glade Reservoir for use in future dry years.

NISP has widespread support. Including every major agricultural organization in the state, eight newspaper editorial boards, a dozen of the state's leading business advocacy organizations, 12 chambers of commerce, numerous ditch and reservoir companies, water conservancy and conservation districts and 24 members of the state legislature.

For nearly a decade project partners have been pursuing this project and working through a detailed environmental permitting process. This process will help tailor a mitigation plan required by law to offset any potential impacts to the environment. We are discussing a number of options to benefit the environment as this project is constructed, including adding more water to the Poudre River at times of the year when it currently runs low and minimizing impacts through channel improvement and habitat restoration. Experts from Colorado Parks and Wildlife will lead this effort to develop a state fish and wildlife mitigation plan in the coming years.

Northern Water and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have and are listening to the public and state and federal agencies on proposed mitigation and enhancement measures. They have pledged to work within the environmental permitting process to see that NISP is built in a manner that protects and enhances the region's environmental heritage. The original proposal for this project was to build a 300-foot-tall dam in the Poudre Canyon. We listened to the public and moved the reservoir site out of the canyon to an offstream location -- Glade Reservoir, a change we agree makes environmental sense.

We are confident that this project combines storage opportunities, good water conservation practices and the ability to mitigate environmental challenges to fish and wildlife in a way that makes sense for our communities and other water users over the long run.

Please go to gladereservoir.org for more information about NISP and an upcoming support rally scheduled for July 24.

Bob Juhl is President, Left Hand Water District Board of Directors; Joseph A. Wilson is Mayor, Town of Erie; and Carolyn Cutler is Mayor, City of Lafayette.