

NISP will benefit Northern Colorado

Fort Collins Coloradoan

July 24, 2012

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The Colorado State Demographer publishes forecasted population trends through 2040. From the state's current estimated total of 5.21 million, our state's population is expected to increase by at least 1.6 percent annually to an estimated 7.92 million in July 2040. During this same period, the Fort Collins-Loveland Metropolitan Statistical Area population will increase from 310,000 to 487,000. This population increase of 177,000 people will translate into more than 65,000 more residential units.

As both the state and the Fort Collins-Loveland MSA populations are predicted to increase over this 28-year period, the challenge facing our communities is to provide adequate water supplies. Part of this solution undoubtedly is continued conservation programs to maximize our water resources. However, based upon the draft December 2011 city of Fort Collins water supply and demand report, the typical residence uses 160,000 gallons of water annually. This equates to ½ acre-foot of new water supplies needed per residence.

From a historical perspective, many in Fort Collins do not realize that in our semi-arid climate, Northern Colorado was able to grow to its present size because of the creation of the Colorado-Big Thompson water project. Dating to the mid-1930s, our area has benefited from trans-mountain water diversions from the western slope. Grand Lake, Carter Lake and Horsetooth Reservoir are tangible evidence of the successful Big-T water system.

The next answer for the northern Front Range is the creation of additional water storage projects to provide the necessary water resources for our region. During the last two decades, our local governments have bought water previously used in agriculture to meet increased municipal demands arising from increased populations. New storage would allow the capture of Poudre and South Platte River water during high spring run-offs to provide resources for new storage.

In 2000, a new entity was formed called the Northern Integrated Supply Project. NISP is composed of 15 communities and water districts to meet future municipal water demands. By 2001, the organization was able to complete a feasibility study calling for the creation of the Glade Reservoir system.

Glade is a proposed 170,000 acre-foot storage facility north of Fort Collins along Highway 287. This facility is not located on the Poudre River, so the river would not be dammed. In fact, in 1986, under legislation advanced by then-Congressman Hank Brown, the Poudre River was designated as Colorado's first Wild and Scenic River. The lower eight miles within the Poudre Canyon were left undesignated to allow for possible water storage projects. The Glade project, though allowed by this legislation, does not impact the river other than to divert excess spring flows.

Glade would be coupled with the new 45,000 acre-foot Galeton Reservoir northeast of Greeley to create additional water storage.

In 2008, a draft environment impact statement was submitted to the U.S. Corps of Engineers. In February 2009, the Corps asked for a supplemental EIS. From 2009 through 2013, supplemental studies were conducted.

After six years and tens of millions of dollars of studies, a final decision by the Corps is anticipated in 2014. At long last, agricultural interests will be defended, minimum stream flows of the Poudre River will be protected, a new recreational facility will be created, and new water storage will be built. The benefits of this project for both our current population and the future of Colorado are just too obvious!

John Knezovich is a certified public accountant and former Fort Collins mayor and City Council member.