

Rep. Gardner touts NISP: water rules are needed

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By Bobby Magill

BERTHOUD - The mountain snowpack is critically below average in Colorado with some river basins seeing a little more than half the normal amount of snow for this time of year, U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service data show.

That's why Colorado needs to build new reservoirs as soon as possible, including the proposed Glade Reservoir, and why U.S. Environmental Protection Agency needs to get out of the way of that effort, U.S. Rep. Cory Gardner said Monday. Speaking at a town hall meeting at the Northern Water headquarters in Berthoud, he tied water availability and water storage to job growth in Colorado.

Alarmed that the NRCS warned him this year's mountain snowpack conditions are dangerously similar to those of 2002 - the year of the Hayman Fire and one of the Rockies' worst droughts in recent memory - Gardner said these kinds of conditions will hurt Colorado farmers and the economy if more water storage isn't available during dry years.

"If we are going to have a long-term outlook for economic growth, we must have the water that is necessary to survive and grow," he said. "That's not only to meet the needs of the population, that's to meet the needs of agriculture and industry. That's why I think we need to go forward with projects like NISP, and we need to go look for other new projects."

NISP calls for the construction of Glade Reservoir, which would be built atop U.S. Highway 287 north of Fort Collins. The less water stored in the state's reservoirs, the more difficult it will be for the state to supply water for its agricultural and industrial needs this summer.

Gardner said EPA regulations imposed by other federal agencies should not be used to stall new water storage projects, including NISP. The EPA criticized an environmental review of NISP for insufficiently addressing the project's impacts on water quality and other issues.

"The numbers speak for themselves: 69 percent-of-average snowpack," he said. "Two-thirds of the value of the state's agricultural production occurs in the South Platte Basin. Last year, a million acre-feet of water left the state that we could have stored right up here (in Glade)."

Monday's NRCS snowpack data show the South Platte River Basin, which includes the Poudre River, has a snowpack 72 percent of average, while the Laramie-North Platte River Basin, which includes Cameron Pass west of Fort Collins, has a snowpack 61 percent of normal. The driest river basins in the state are the Gunnison and Colorado river basins, which are at 56 and 57 percent of normal, respectively.

Asked whether he wants to see the EPA abolished, something many GOP presidential contenders are advocating for because they perceive EPA regulations to be stifling job growth, Gardner said the agency needs to be kept under control.

"We're working with EPA to try and make sure their bureaucrats don't get in the way of commonsense Colorado ideas, and we'll continue to do that," he said, adding later, "We need good common sense environmental regulation, where they go too far, that's where we need to make sure we're doing our part in oversight."