

# Gardner has good idea on water projects

Greeley Tribune Editorial

April 6, 2013

Cory Gardner may be on to something.

The Colorado Republican is working on a bill that would speed up the federal permitting process for new water storage efforts, such as the Northern Integrated Supply Project, if they are endorsed by the governor of state in which they're built. Of course the bill isn't finalized yet, and the devil frequently resides in the details. We'll reserve judgment on the legislation itself, but we like the basic idea. Essentially, it would require federal agencies to deliver a "yes" or "no" decision on a proposed water project within about nine months of the time that the governor offers support to a project.

We need look no further than our own backyard to see why this is important. NISP has been in the federal permitting process since 2004. That means the 15 participating cities and water districts already have spent about \$12 million on the project and have waited nearly a decade to find out whether they can proceed. That's too long by any measure, and there isn't any good reason to believe the waiting will end soon.

Of course, it's worth noting that Gov. John Hickenlooper hasn't yet endorsed NISP, and some people have concerns about the project.

Still, we doubt it would take Hickenlooper a decade to make up his mind.

We understand that the issues over which the federal government has oversight on these kinds of water projects frequently are complex. We know that time must be built into the process to hear comment from the public, and we agree that oversight is needed.

In fact, while we support NISP, we're not opposed to the federal government declining to approve some proposed projects if there's a compelling reason to do so. The point is to speed up the decision. If a project were rejected in a reasonable amount of time, that would give water authorities the ability to tweak existing plans, or come up with a new plan altogether. Both those outcomes, at least, advance the ball. That helps everyone.

No one believes water storage projects should simply receive rubber-stamp approval, but anyone who's lived in this area for any length of time understands how important water is. The drought of the past two years makes clear just what a project like NISP means to this area. Because NISP hasn't yet been built, we've lost more than 1.4 million acre-feet of water since 2009. That would make a huge difference to farmers and thirsty municipalities in these drought years.

We think Gardner's proposal offers a reasonable way to speed up the process without doing away entirely with oversight.

We hope to see a bill.