

# Opinion: NISP study can move ahead now because of funding

Fort Collins Coloradoan Opinion

May 27, 2013

By John Clarke

I have long been a supporter of the Northern Integrated Supply Project (Glade and Galetton reservoirs) because it involves storing water that is only available in the Poudre River during particularly wet years.

That water is now lost downstream and does us no good. Using the present overall supply of water for residential and business growth can come from only one place — agricultural users. Basically, without NISP to provide towns and cities with additional water, most of the farmland we have will dry up. The loss of those farms will deprive us of an important industry — agriculture — and turn the beautiful green fields that provide us with a fantastic environmental amenity into brown weeds and dust.

The Environmental Impact Statement for NISP is getting a second look from the Omaha District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the entity that will approve or disapprove construction of the project. Originally, the updated EIS was due this fall, but there seems to be some doubt as to whether the work will be completed by then, due to a lack of funding for the Corps. It seems possible that the sequestering of federal dollars might have played a role in the delay.

On Friday, I received an email saying the Corps had accepted the offer from the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District (Northern Water) — the agency that represents the 22 water users that comprise the NISP partners — to help pay for the costs of expediting the updated EIS. This funding assistance had been in the works since April 2.

Included in the final decision document is the following statement:

“To ensure the use of non-federal funds received from Northern Water will not impact impartial decision-making with respect to the NISP EIS and 404 Permit applications, either substantively or procedurally, the Corps will implement the following procedures.”

Those procedures will include establishing a “...separate account to track the receipt and expenditures of the funds so Corps employees can charge their time against the account when working on the NISP EIS.” When the Northern Water funds are used, the “...decision for NISP will be reviewed by Corps staff at least one level above the decision maker, unless the decision maker is the Corps Omaha District Commander.”

To further quote the document, “The Corps will not eliminate any procedures or decisions that would otherwise be required for the NISP EIS and 404 Permit application under consideration. The Corps will continue to comply with all applicable Federal laws, statutes, regulations and guidance. Funds will be expended only to expedite the preparation, review and coordination of the NISP EIS and the evaluation of the NISP 404 Permit application.”

The NISP money would not be used for public hearings or supervisory review of the document; those processes are required by law and do not change as the review is expedited, so that stipulation seems appropriate and proper.

It also makes sense to me that with the need to move stored water from the NISP-proposed Glade Reservoir downstream to the proposed Galeton Reservoir, the flows of the Poudre through Fort Collins will improve and we will benefit from a more vibrant and wet river.

*John Clarke is a former county commissioner, former City Council member, photographer and hosts a radio program from 7 to 9 a.m. Saturdays on 93.5 FM. His column runs on the fourth Tuesday of each month.*