

Survey: Strong support for NISP water storage plan

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After nearly 30 years, several lawsuits and extensive study, a sampling of Northern Colorado residents remain in favor of Northern Water's controversial plan to channel Poudre River water into two new reservoirs, according to a recent independent poll commissioned by the company.

The Northern Integrated Supply Project, or NISP, has been in the works since the 1980s, and proposes the creation of Glade Reservoir, just north of Fort Collins, in addition to another reservoir to store water reserves that could be channeled to Colorado's Eastern Plains. Slowly, Northern Water has been making its case for the reservoir, getting the necessary approvals from the Colorado Department of Transportation and working through two studies of the proposal's environmental impacts, but has been forestalled by lawsuits and environmentalist opposition.

The recently completed survey is the second the company has commissioned since 2008. The first survey was released when the first Environmental Impact Statement — a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers examination of the project's potential environmental damage — was finished. Although 70 percent of Larimer and Weld county participants in the first survey said they were in favor of the NISP project, outcry at the environmental study's results convinced the Corps of Engineers to do a supplement study, to be completed in 2014.

The second survey, completed in July, showed participants slightly more in favor of NISP — 72 percent said they support the project, according to Denver-based polling and consulting company Cirulli Associates.

Cirulli, which also did the 2008 survey, called 900 registered voters in Larimer, Weld and Morgan counties and asked them two questions. One asked if residents were basically in favor of the project, while the second asked if the decade spent studying the environmental impacts of the project is sufficient time.

Sixty-eight percent of Larimer County respondents were in favor of the project, up from 63 percent in 2008. Seventy-nine percent of Weld County respondents were in favor, down from 81 percent in 2008. Morgan County, with a 60 percent approval rate, was polled for the first time. Between 72 percent and 75 percent of respondents from all three counties said that 10 years was sufficient time to study the projects impacts.

Fort Collins and Fort Morgan had the highest percentages of strongly opposed residents, the poll also showed. Fort Collins had 10 percent and Fort Morgan had 7 percent.

The project still has several hurdles to clear before it can become a reality. Once the new EIS is released, Northern Water must settle legal disputes.