

Another Mile Marker Approaches On NISP's Long Road To New Reservoirs

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A proposal to build new reservoirs that would take water from the Poudre River hits a key deadline June 19. Residents of Northern Colorado can be forgiven, though, if the Northern Integrated Supply Project doesn't ring a bell. It's been seven years since the project's last deadline.

The last time NISP and its two proposed reservoirs was in the news was in 2008 and 2009, when a draft environmental impact statement was released.

The rationale behind the project, in a word, is [growth](#). Many of the smaller towns in Northern Colorado lack high quality water supplies and they're [growing like crazy](#). Windsor, one of the towns that would receive water from the project, saw a 12.5 percent increase in its population over the last four years.

In their quest for water, eleven Colorado towns and four water districts banded together with Northern Water, the utility that currently runs the Colorado-Big Thompson water project, and proposed NISP in 2004.

Starting to sound familiar yet?

If not, as a reminder, you should know that the project calls for two reservoirs, one above Fort Collins and the other northeast of Greeley. Both would be offstream, so they would not block the river. The bigger of the two, Glade Reservoir, is slated to be slightly larger than Horsetooth Reservoir, 170,000 acre-feet in size. It will require the rerouting of seven miles of Highway 287 running between Fort Collins and Laramie, Wyoming.

In 2009, the U.S. Army Corps, which is responsible for permitting the project, decided it needed some additional information. This is because two other expansion projects for existing reservoirs, one for the city of Fort Collins and another for Greeley, are also planned on the river. But the hydrologic models used by Northern Water, Fort Collins, and Greeley were using different baselines, making it hard to determine the real impact of the project. The Corps used the intervening years to make sure the models were on the same page, and also do additional environmental analysis.

The project would divert water off the Poudre River and pump it up into Glade Reservoir and the smaller reservoir, Galeton, primarily during high flows. Doing this would make 40,000 new acre-feet of water per year available to those participating in the project. (An acre-foot is the amount of water it takes to cover an acre of land one foot deep.)

New storage isn't the only answer to thirsty cities' water quest. Front Range towns could buy water from farmers. Agriculture still uses the lion's share of water in Colorado, and building a new project is expensive; it's slated to cost around \$500 million.

Brian Werner, a spokesman for Northern Water, said additional drying of ag lands is part of what the project is trying to avoid.

"We want some alternatives so the only option isn't to go out and continue to [buy and dry](#)," Werner said.

Of course, the project has its detractors. The Fort Collins group [Save the Poudre](#) was founded in opposition to NISP. It's concerned about the effect water diversion would have on the health of the river and on recreation.

Glade Reservoir would divert a maximum of 1,200 cubic feet per second of water off the Poudre River. Over the last four years, the average high flow of the Poudre River at the Fort Collins stream gauge during spring runoff has been around 3,000 cfs. It was at 2,740 cfs at noon on June 16. During the September 2013 floods, flows reached 10,000 cfs.

Bart Miller, the water program director for [Western Resource Advocates](#), an environmental group based in Boulder, said he hopes the Army Corps seriously considers whether a large new storage project is necessary at the moment. Other water districts, like Denver Water and the town of Aurora, are implementing more creative systems that "create" more water without building new reservoirs, he said.

"You can put together a package that has currently supplies already developed, some amount of recycling, some amount of sharing water with agriculture some amount of active conservation, some amount that could help meet the demands over the next several decades," said Miller.

There will be a 45-day opportunity to comment on the Army Corp's Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement, which will be released June 19, 2015. The Corps is also holding two public meetings. The first is July 22, at 5 p.m. at the Fort Collins Hilton. The second is July 23 at 5 p.m. at the Weld County Administration Building.

After it takes public comment, the Corps will release a final environmental impact statement in summer 2016. Following that, it will make a decision on the project's permit.

Audio is available at <http://www.kunc.org/post/another-mile-marker-approaches-nisp-s-long-road-new-reservoirs>