

Editorial: Strike balance between water storage, conservation

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In June, the [Army Corps of Engineers released](#) its [supplemental draft environmental impact statement](#) regarding the proposed Northern Integrated Supply Project, better known as NISP.

The project is planned to provide 40,000 acre-feet of water annually and calls for construction of two new reservoirs.

Comparatively speaking, Glade would be slightly larger than Horsetooth Reservoir and cover land north of Ted's Place, near Laporte. The smaller of the two, Galeton, would be built northeast of Greeley and filled with water from the South Platte River. NISP's estimated price tag is \$718.25 million (uses available distribution methods) or \$933 million (requires new pipeline).

Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District and its 15 members say the project is vital to addressing the region's future water needs, keeping Colorado water in Colorado, [its representatives have told the Coloradoan](#). Members of group Save the Poudre told the Editorial Board they aren't against water storage but fear NISP's environmental impact, saying the project will reduce flows in the Poudre River and turn it to a "muddy, stinking ditch."

More than a decade in the making, the project has been and will continue to be divisive. At its core, it is a public discussion about growth. Where we go as a city and county from here; how many people will call our community home; and whether we'll have resources to support everyone and preserve the quality of life to which we've grown accustomed.

The population of Colorado is expected to double, to 10 million by 2050; Fort Collins and Larimer County are growing, too.

Quite simply, storing water for the future through NISP is critical.

That's not to say it should be built without question. It will be important to monitor flow levels. As a community, we must hold Northern Water to its promises that the project will provide more water when it is needed most — when the river is at its lowest level.

As the [Coloradoan reported previously](#), during an average water year, flows on the Poudre River average 529 cubic feet per second in June. During a wet year, 908 cfs. A 2008 ERO [report](#) says those numbers would drop to 245 and 368 cfs, respectively, if Glade is built.

Improved water storage isn't the only answer, however.

From 2002 to 2013, per-person water use in Fort Collins has fallen from 183 gallons a day to 141 gallons, [according to the city's 2013 water conservation report](#). We have an opportunity today to continue to reduce our usage so we don't find ourselves in a situation like that of California tomorrow.

How do we work now to shut off sprinklers when it's raining, take shorter showers and lean more heavily upon Xeriscaping techniques? Conservation will be key — but planning for future needs, which will be greater, is as well.

Northern Water expects a final environmental impact statement from the Army Corps of Engineers to be released in 2016 and a final permit decision in 2017. The major water distributor for Northern Colorado thinks the project should and can be built as soon as possible thereafter, but it's very possible NISP wouldn't come to fruition for many more years.

Litigation could stall construction for years. As a community, we realize we should built NISP sooner rather than later, versus facing almost-certain increased construction costs and facing greater need.

The future of water in Colorado is a behemoth issue. It's not black and white.

But we have the opportunity to be at the forefront of that discussion, striking a balance between responsible storage and conservation.

There is an open house at 5 p.m. Wednesday, July 22, and a 6 p.m. hearing thereafter at the Hilton Fort Collins, 425 W. Prospect Road. Attendees may share their perspectives during a public comment period.