

# Experts look for answers while digesting NISP report

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By Nick Coltrain

It's easy to understand what the Northern Integrated Supply Project promises Northern Colorado: Extra water storage and new recreational opportunities to rival Horsetooth Reservoir.

What isn't so easy to understand is at what cost in cash and environmental impacts.

The project, more than a decade in the making, hit [another milestone last week](#) with the release of the supplemental draft environmental impact statement — a 1,500-page document that details everything from money that could come from recreation to water quality in the Poudre River.

Northern Water, the major water distributor in Northern Colorado, 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 draft covers so much ground that pro, con and neutral parties all have a similar response: It'll take time and discussions to flesh out the findings.

"At this point, we don't really know enough to speak to the supplemental draft," Fort Collins Natural Areas Director John Stokes said. "It's probably going to be a couple weeks because it's a very complicated, voluminous, detailed document and it's going to take us a while to get our arms around it."

Even though it's been just a week since its release, here's a quick summation of the various views on it.

**PREVIOUS:** [Glade Reservoir project hits new milestone](#)

## Northern Water

The biggest push for NISP has come from the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District and its 15 members that would use the new reservoir for future water needs. The public agency initially heralded the supplemental report as a milestone in a journey that started about 12 years ago.

Its spokesman, Brian Werner, still calls the report "one of the most detailed analysis anyone has ever done." That said, he also acknowledges that now comes the push to explain exactly how NISP would benefit the Front Range and the Poudre River.

The river, Werner said, will see steadier flows because stored water can be released from Glade Reservoir, the proposed water storage body of water central to NISP, preventing the Poudre from running too low during droughts.

As for how it would benefit the entire Front Range, Glade Reservoir and NISP would keep Colorado water in Colorado — and keep municipalities from turning to agriculture to secure water for growing populations, Werner said.

"We don't want the only alternative to be to go buy farmer John's land for the future water supply, especially if farmer John wants to keep farming," Werner said.

## Save the Poudre

If Northern Water needs a yang to its yin, look to Save the Poudre and its executive director, Gary Wockner.

The group has waged a decade-long battle against the project.

A week after the draft supplemental environmental impact statement's release, that tune hasn't changed. Wockner described the proposed mitigation — the efforts to keep water flowing in the Poudre even as it is diverted to the reservoir — as "a farce." He warns the impact on the river will be "significantly more severe" than what the Army Corps of Engineers describes in the report.

"When Mr. Werner says the river is going to be better off with the project, that's absolutely a false statement," Wockner said.

Concerns include pollution in the river, especially as clean snow runoff is diverted to the reservoir while rain and ditch water flow through freely, Wockner said.

He said a group of scientists and lawyers are picking over the report now and plan to release a rebuttal as part of public comment in the next month or so.

The public comment period initially runs for 45 days, until Aug. 4, but it could be extended. Save the Poudre plans to ask for an extension. U.S. Rep. Jared Polis, a Democrat whose district includes Fort Collins, asked for an extension before the new report came out. The Army Corps of Engineers plans to make a decision about extending the public comment period in the next week or so.

### **City of Fort Collins**

Stokes was hesitant to speak on the project.

"Really, the only thing I can say about that at this point is that we are reviewing carefully that supplemental draft," he said.

The city's concerns include water quality, ecology, floodplain issues, recreation, financial impact and what exactly the mitigation plan would mean for river flows. Stokes and city staff are analyzing the report and plan to present to the City Council for guidance at the end of July, or later if the public comment period is extended.

The City Council in 2008, while of a different makeup than it is today, criticized NISP as having "major adverse impacts" on the Poudre sections that flow through the city. It asked for the supplemental draft environmental impact statement as a result.

### **Larimer County**

Larimer County is largely in the same position as the city, to an extent: County commissioners are waiting for the environmental and science advisory board to give an "apolitical, science-based analysis" about what the project would mean, Chairman Lew Gaiter said.

While the three-member commission is pro-NISP in principle, Gaiter said his support isn't blind. Chiefly, he wants to make sure the environmental impacts are minimal and recreational opportunities that come with a new reservoir are preserved.

"There's been a number of years where if we had it in place, we would have had it filled up by the water that otherwise left our community," he said.

### **Rafting companies**

Glade Reservoir, which would be located near Ted's Place at U.S. 287 and Colorado Highway 14, is downriver enough that it should leave the Poudre's recreational users' favorite canyon spots relatively unscathed.

Brad Modesitt, owner of Mountain Whitewater Descents, said it won't be much a benefit or detriment to his business.

"You don't often get much security in the rafting business, so it's nice to hear that our river won't be messed with," Modesitt said.

[Rafting in Fort Collins](#), where voters just approved using a sales tax to help pay for a whitewater park, is another matter. A 2008 report commissioned by the city warned that average flows could drop by half if Glade Reservoir is built.

### **NISP at a glance**

**Estimated cost\*:** \$718.25 million (uses available distribution methods), or \$933 million (requires new pipeline)

**New water supply:** 40,000 acre-feet annually

**Glade Reservoir:** Would cover land north of Ted's Place and south Owl Canyon, near Laporte, with 170,000 acre-feet of water, and would be slightly bigger than Horsetooth Reservoir

**Galeton Reservoir:** Would have total storage capacity of about 45,000 acre-feet, filled with water from the South Platte River, and be built northeast of Greeley

**Timeline:** Northern Water expects a final environmental impact statement from the Army Corps of Engineers to be released in 2016 and a final permit decision to come in 2017.

\*Estimated cost is for 13-year project development period, as estimated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

### **Public comment**

#### **Open houses and hearings for oral and/or written comments:**

July 22 in Fort Collins: 5 p.m. open house, 6 p.m. hearing. Hilton Fort Collins, 425 W. Prospect Road

July 23 in Greeley: 5 p.m. open house, 6 p.m. hearing. Weld County Administration Building, 1150 O St.

#### **Submit comments in writing to:**

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Denver Regulatory Office  
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