

NISP Reaches Another Milestone

Fort Morgan one of the largest stakeholders in proposed massive water storage project

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Fort Morgan's investment of more than \$1 million in a massive water storage project is another step closer toward paying off.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on Friday released its Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement about the proposed Northern Integrated Supply Project.

"The city is extremely excited for the release of the supplemental draft EIS," Fort Morgan Water Resources/Utilities Director Brent Nation said Friday. "It marks an important milestone in the progress of the NISP project. Even though the release doesn't guarantee construction of NISP, it does indicate that the project is moving forward."

The environmental impact study — which began in 2009 after four years of drafting the original environmental impact statement — is "one of the most extensive and intensive reviews of a water project ever undertaken in Colorado," according to Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, which is coordinating and would manage NISP. It includes the results of new studies on riparian habitat, water quality, aquatic resources and hydrologic modeling.

So far, the 15 participants in NISP have spent around \$15 million total over 12 years toward this proposed water storage project, which would build Glade Reservoir near Fort Collins and Galeton Reservoir near Ault.

"The Supplemental Draft EIS provides decision-makers and the public information pertaining to proposed actions and alternatives, and discloses environmental impacts and identifies mitigation measures to reduce impacts," an Army Corps of Engineers news release stated.

"The SDEIS includes a proposed mitigation plan illustrating how NISP participants will provide additional water to the Poudre River during low flows, build low-flow/fish-friendly bypass structures at key sites on the river through Fort Collins, and implement river restoration measures," a Northern Water news release stated.

As of Friday, the NISP SDEIS became available for review on the Army Corps of Engineers website at www.nwo.usace.army.mil/Missions/RegulatoryProgram/Colorado/EISNISP.

A paper copy of it also will be available at Fort Morgan Public Library, 414 Main St., in Fort Morgan.

The Army Corps of Engineers now will accept written comments on the NISP SDEIS through Aug. 4 that can be emailed to nisp.eis@usace.army.mil.

And in July, the Corps will hold two open houses immediately followed by formal public hearings. The first one will be July 22 at the Hilton Fort Collins, 425 W. Prospect Road, in Fort Collins. The second will be July 23 at the Weld County Administration Building, 1150 O St., in Greeley. Each will have an open house at 5 p.m., followed by the public hearing at 6 p.m, where people will be able to express their support for or concerns about NISP.

In Morgan County, NISP participants include Fort Morgan and Morgan County Quality Water District in Morgan County. Other participants include: Central Weld County Water District, Fort Collins-Loveland Water District, Left Hand Water District, Dacono, Eaton, Erie, Evans, Firestone, Fort Lupton, Frederick, Lafayette, Windsor and Severance.

"The SDEIS shows that the project is needed to meet a portion of the participants' future water needs," Northern Water General Manger Eric Wilkinson said.

Supporters of NISP include political officials, including U.S. Sen. Cory Gardner and U.S. Rep. Ken Buck, R-CD4.

"We definitely have, it seems like, the support of our congressional people," Nation previously said.

Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper is not taking a position on NISP due to potential conflict from state Division of Parks workers under him having to make decisions related to water storage projects.

Those against NISP include the Save the Poudre organization, savethepoudre.org, which argues that better use of conservation techniques and small-scale water storage would be enough to meet water needs for those in the Poudre watershed, while also wasting less water from evaporation and causing less environmental and animal habitat damage.

The public hearings will be a prominent opportunity for supporters and detractors, alike, to express their views about the proposed massive water storage project.

But for communities like Fort Morgan, something like NISP may be the only option for gaining long-term water security to allow growth. The release of the NISP SDEIS puts the Fort Morgan and other participants one step closer toward having a guaranteed future water supply.

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