

NISP the right answer for Northern Colorado's future

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Guest Column by Eric Wilkinson

The Northern Integrated Supply Project just makes sense.

It is a much-needed water storage project that will help meet current and future water needs for 15 water-supply entities within the northern Front Range. Like the Colorado-Big Thompson and Windy Gap projects, which previously were developed to serve the water supply needs of the region, NISP will provide water to serve future generations.

The participants include four water districts and 11 cities and towns that currently deliver water to 225,000 residents. Based on conservative projections, those numbers will more than double by mid-century.

The NISP participants have instituted forward-thinking water conservation programs and have collectively reduced their water usage by 20 percent in the past two decades. They all take conservation seriously, yet realize conservation alone will not meet all their future needs.

But this is not the only reason we need NISP.

NISP will help protect our valuable agricultural economy by lessening the need for growing cities to turn to purchasing farms for their future water supplies.

Without pooling resources to build NISP, the participants would likely pursue alternatives that would accelerate the dry-up of more than 64,000 acres of irrigated agricultural lands, which would have an \$87 million impact on economic output for the region. This would drastically change the agricultural landscape in Northern Colorado.

There is a reason all major Colorado agricultural organizations have endorsed NISP: It just makes sense. They realize that the alternative to building NISP is to dry up an additional 100 square miles of northeastern Colorado, an option no one wants to see.

NISP makes sense because it will store excess water currently leaving the state in years of abundance. Earlier this year, in May and June, more than 1.3 million acre-feet of water flowed downstream and out of state because we had nowhere to store that water. All of Colorado's existing reservoirs were full. Of the amount lost to Colorado, 121,000 acre feet could have been stored by NISP.

NISP participants understand the environmental concerns and have developed an extensive mitigation proposal to address the effects identified in the supplemental draft environmental impact statement. This proposal addresses potentially affected environmental resources.

The mitigation plan includes a release of water from Glade Reservoir during times when the Poudre River flows are at their lowest, during the winter and the month of September. The NISP participants have also agreed to reconstruct the Poudre Valley Canal diversion structure near the canyon mouth and retrofit four large diversion

structures on the Poudre River to provide fish passage and to convey water released from Glade for flow enhancement downstream, both of which are not possible today.

In addition, the participants are committing \$6 million for habitat and channel improvements along the river corridor from the Poudre canyon all the way down to the confluence with the South Platte River.

NISP will help improve existing conditions by implementing these and several other measures proposed in the mitigation plans being developed. The NISP participants and Northern Water have pledged to work with Fort Collins, Greeley and other Poudre Basin interests to develop and refine measures to enhance the Poudre River.

NISP makes sense because the science shows that the project and the Poudre River can co-exist, and the NISP participants working cooperatively with basin water users and stakeholders can make the Poudre River a more healthy and sustainable ecosystem.

As the Army Corps of Engineers moves towards a Final EIS, Record-of-Decision and issuance of a 404 permit for NISP, Northern Water will continue to further develop and refine mitigation options for NISP-related impacts and work with others to identify and cooperatively implement enhancements beneficial to the Poudre River. We want to assure the public that NISP will be developed in an environmentally responsible manner while meeting the water-supply needs for our future generations.

In the end, we all want a healthy and sustainable Poudre River and a vibrant regional economy. NISP can help us get there.

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