

# Our view: NISP needed to solve region's water problem

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The future of water in Northern Colorado — and our state as a whole — is now.

The population of Colorado is expected to double, to 10 million by 2050. The growth rates in Fort Collins and Larimer are expected to mirror that of the state.

With that growth comes a need for water. Where will it come from?

Northern Water, which is a public agency that co-operates the Colorado Big Thompson Water Project, would like to build two reservoirs, pipelines and water pumping stations. The estimated \$500 million project is called Northern Integrated Supply Project, or NISP.

It was conceived long ago and has long been a source of conflict.

It's our view that if Fort Collins and Northern Colorado is to continue to grow in a smart and sophisticated way, we've got to give NISP a fair shake.

Conservation efforts in Northern Colorado are working. 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](#).

But now is the time to plan for the future.

Northern Water is set to receive a long-awaited report from the [Army Corps of Engineers later this year](#). The environmental impact study will set in motion a series of new hurdles for the project.

There's land acquisition — from CSU, the Forest Service and BLM. Approvals from various state and federal entities. Potential court challenges, specifically from those that are concerned the Poudre River will be adversely impacted.

However, the plan is viable. Save water in significant weather years for when we face drought, as we did in the early 2000s.

The Colorado Big Thompson Water Project (or CBT) became fully operational in 1957 set up to support agriculture and supply water to farmers. Its original use looks different than its current use, which is now primarily industrial and municipal (comprising 67 percent of CBT's customers).

Municipal means housing. Building permits for single-family homes in Fort Collins are at an all-time high, the Coloradoan's Pat Ferrier reported earlier this month and, by the end of the decade Larimer County will need 18,000 additional housing units.

Water district representatives told the editorial board that NISP would supply customers — rural or urban — with approximately 40,000 acre-feet (possibly more) of new, reliable water supply each year through pumping stations, pipelines and two new reservoirs — Glade, to be built northwest of Fort Collins, and Galetton, northeast of Greeley. That amount of water is slightly larger than Horsetooth Reservoir.

The dozens of ongoing legal battles over water rights alone illustrate the complexity of this issue.

NISP is just one project that's part of a constructive conversation that's beginning to happen on a higher level. Gov. John Hickenlooper has issued an executive order to develop a plan addressing the state's water challenges. Stakeholders involved in that process are changing the nature of water in Colorado by bringing together new basins and districts.

Northern Colorado has an opportunity to move on a long-delayed but forward-looking solution, with its support of NISP.

Agriculture would be the first loser, given demands municipalities and industry. NISP would ensure that as much as 45 percent of irrigated agriculture in the South Platte Basin is not lost, Northern Water reports. It's not just about Fort Collins. It's about enough water for many needs. Inaction could lead to our community being stranded in a dry river with only a paddle.

### **Learn ways you can help**

As the region grows, more people will become dependent upon a limited resource – water. While we as a community will have to identify new sources, it's also paramount that we conserve of the existing supply as possible.

That's why the Coloradoan Editorial Board encourages members of the community to tour Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District's conservation gardens in Berthoud, 220 Water Ave.

Walking through Xeriscape Plaza or looking upon alternative grass mixes, homeowners, industry and landscape professionals can learn practical ways to preserve water.

For more information, visit [www.northernwater.org](http://www.northernwater.org) or call 800-369-7246.

### **The Issue**

Our state — and Northern Colorado — faces a water shortage as the population grows. The Northern Integrated Water Supply project, in tandem with other efforts, is key to solving that problem.