

# Pro-Con: The Northern Integrated Supply Project

Coloradan

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*Opinion by Michael D. DiTullio & Mark Easter*

If the Northern Integrated Supply Project was built, water from the Poudre River would be diverted to Glade Reservoir. (Photo: Coloradoan Library)

*Michael D. DiTullio is general manager of Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, (NOTE: Michael D. DiTullio is the GM of the Fort Collins-Loveland Water District, a NISP participant. Eric Wilkinson remains Northern Water's GM.) a proponent of the Northern Integrated Supply Project. Mark Easter, an opponent, is the board chair for Save the Poudre: Poudre Waterkeeper. Here's what they had to say about the proposal to build two reservoirs that would add 40,000 acre feet of water to the Front Range's inventory.*

**Question:** *Recently released is the Army Corps of Engineers' nearly 1500-page supplemental draft environmental impact statement for proposed NISP. What do you want community members to know?*

**DiTullio:** The biggest takeaway is that the SDEIS reveals the impacts of the project are minor and can be successfully mitigated. The participants are committed to making sure this project is built in an environmentally responsible manner. For instance, the low-flow augmentation release will increase the flows in the river at the times it is most needed, which is generally through the summer. By building bypass structures at four diversion dams through Fort Collins the project will allow those minimum flows to move downstream and also allow fish passage back upstream. Both of which do not occur today.

**Easter:** In nearly every aspect, NISP/Glade Reservoir is as bad, or worse than was previously proposed. The SDEIS reveals that NISP/Glade has not fundamentally changed — it would further drain and destroy the Cache la Poudre River, stripping the heart of the June Rise and diverting a huge chunk of the river at the canyon mouth. The Poudre will not survive if NISP/Glade is built. The Poudre would become a silted up, stinking ditch through Fort Collins.

**Q:** *There's debate about whether Glade Reservoir, if built, would reduce flows in the Poudre River.*

**DiTullio:** This issue has been studied extensively for the past six years, and the results show there will be a small reduction during the spring rise but only when the snow pack is above normal. The biggest take to the river is that the project will provide more water when it is needed most, when the river is at its lowest level. This will provide for a live stream through Fort Collins year-round and to maintain a trout fishery in downtown Fort Collins. No other group or entity have done anything close to cleaning up the river that this project will.

**Easter:** The Water Resources Technical Report, published with the SDEIS, shows the stark truth — flows below the canyon mouth would be hurt in almost all years. May, June and July flows — the peak flows so critically important to healthy Front Range rivers — would be cut the most, nearly 15 billion gallons in wet years, 3.8 billion gallons in dry years and 6.1 billion gallons on average at the Lincoln Street Bridge.

**Q:** *A lot of people talk about Glade Reservoir and damming the Poudre River as one in the same. Is that correct?*

**DiTullio:** The Glade Reservoir is not a dam on the main stem of the Poudre River. The reservoir is located off stream, making NISP more environmentally friendly. The reservoir will create a new flat water fishery and recreational area that will benefit the citizens of Northern Colorado.

**Easter:** No matter where you put the reservoir, the result would be the same. The last free-flowing, unallocated water left in the Poudre would be diverted at the canyon mouth, along with an additional 20,000 acre feet per year (6.5 billion gallons) of water typically diverted by farmers downstream. The river downstream suffers identical fates when that water is diverted, regardless of where the water is stored.

*Q: With this project, there is so much information to digest. What are falsities you'd like to address?*

**DiTullio:** There are two major misconceptions that are advanced by the opponents to NISP: No. 1. That the project will dam the Poudre River, and No. 2. is the project will cause the Poudre to dry up. The Glade Reservoir will be located in a dry valley north of Ted's Place and will have minimal impact on the area. Although the project will take water from the river during the spring runoff, it will not cause the Poudre to run dry. To the contrary, it will in fact add water back to the Poudre, 3600 acre feet annually at critical times to enhance the environment and the fisheries. Further, in response to the concerns of Fort Collins, the NISP participants have agreed not to divert water into Glade if the minimum streamflow's are not being met.

**Easter:** The proponents absurdly claim a winter flow "augmentation" plan would leave the river better than before. They refuse to acknowledge the devastating impact of stripping the peak flows off the river. The proponents have some of the highest per-capita water use rates in the region, yet they claim further water conservation is impractical. And, they turn a blind eye to the fact that NISP would harm agriculture at least as much or worse than if no project were built.

*Q: It could be years until the final EIS is released and further public comment collected, not to mention the possibility of a group challenging the decision in a court of law. Will Glade Reservoir come to fruition? How many years from now?*

**DiTullio:** We don't think it will take years. The project is needed now and should be built as soon as possible. The Army Corps on their website states they will release a final EIS next year. When the record of decision is released in 2017 we believe the project will move forward at that time. Obviously, any one or group has the right to challenge the Army Corps if they so choose to do so. One of the reasons that the Corps moved forward with a SDEIS was to have certainty that whatever decision they make is defensible in court.

**Easter:** It could take the Corps at least three more years to permit or deny the project. If permitted, both EPA and the Colorado Water Quality Control Division have to sign off, taking years more. The Corps faces lawsuits, court battles, and legal action from any proponent or opponent who doesn't get what they want. Expect at least a decade before a resolution or the project dies of its own weight. We will oppose the project as long as it takes.

*Q: What, if any, are alternatives to NISP?*

**DiTullio:** There are no reasonable alternatives. This is well documented in the SDEIS documents. The "no action alternative" is to significantly increase the purchase of water that is used by agriculture which would lead to dry up of existing farmland. Many of the participants rent irrigation water to the ag community and value what they do to enhance the quality of live here in Northern Colorado. Conservation alone will not solve the water issues for Northern Colorado. The opposition champions a scheme that simply is not realistic and will not work.

**Easter:** The Corps touts the project proponent's straw man "no action alternative," an unrealistic and ironic "alternative" that is really no such thing. The Corps and NISP/Glade proponents refuse to accept that new water diversions are a thing of the past, and that conservation, efficiency and partnerships with agriculture must be embraced to keep our rivers alive. The fate of the Cache la Poudre — our home river — depends on collaboration and innovative thinking.

*Q: How do we address water in Fort Collins, while also looking at the state's water future as a whole?*

**DiTullio:** The City of Fort Collins has done a good job of taking care of its citizen's water needs. They were able to secure senior river water rights on the Poudre before many of the participants existed. However, not all of the citizens of Northern Colorado reside in Fort Collins. The water right for the NISP is junior to those of Fort Collins and the city will not be harmed by the project. The participants have an obligation to their citizens to provide a water supply for the future. It is ironic that my district, the Fort Collins-Loveland Water District, currently serves approximately 32,000 residents within the City of Fort Collins.

NISP is only part of how we address the future water needs of Northern Colorado. The water community and this includes the City of Fort Collins must come together in harmony to collectively manage the water resources that we have. None of us can do it alone or should we. We are all citizens of this planet and we all have the right to choose where we live with our families and this includes Northern Colorado.

**Easter:** The Fort Collins water utility is not a NISP/Glade participant. Fortunately, our water utility "gets it." City staff appears to understand the critical importance of innovation in keeping our home river healthy and vibrant while it meets our water needs. In contrast, Northern Water and the NISP/Glade proponents rely on 19th Century solutions to solve 21st Century problems. It is time to embrace the future.

### **Want to weigh in?**

- There is an open house at 5 p.m. Wednesday 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.

- Those who can't attend may submit comments in writing to:

John Urbanic, NISP EIS Project Manager

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Omaha District

Denver Regulatory Office

9307 S. Wadsworth Blvd.

Littleton, CO 80128

E-mail: [nisp.eis@usace.army.mil](mailto:nisp.eis@usace.army.mil)

### **NISP at a glance**

**Estimated cost\*:** \$718.25 million (uses available distribution methods), or \$933 million (requires new pipeline). It would be paid for by Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District.

**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.

Compiled by Nick Coltrain.