

Public Comment Wanted For Proposed Northern Colorado Reservoirs

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By Lauren DiSpirito

FORT COLLINS, Colo. (CBS4) – A 45-day public comment period is now underway for a proposal to build two new reservoirs in Northern Colorado that requires federal approval.

The Northern Integrated Supply Project (NISP) is a proposal to build two new water storage reservoirs, pumping stations and pipeline to store runoff for use by cities and towns.

The Glades Reservoir, northwest of Fort Collins, would be 5 miles long, 260 feet deep and have the capacity to store 170,000 acre-feet of water. It would be slightly larger than Horsetooth Reservoir.

Water from the Poudre River would be diverted to the reservoir through the Poudre Valley Canal. To build Glades, approximately 7 miles of U.S. Highway 287 between Fort Collins and Wyoming would have to be relocated.

Galeton Reservoir, east of Ault and northeast of Greeley, would be filled with water from the South Platte River. At capacity, Galeton would hold up to 40,000 acre-feet of water.

The project is being proposed by Northern Water, a public water district, on behalf of 15 Front Range cities and municipal water districts. Those 15 participants shoulder the project's estimated \$500 million cost.

Northern Water already says participants have spent \$15 million studying the idea. Last week the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers released its Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Study, a follow up to its initial 2008 report meant to address public concerns, detail the plan's environmental impacts, and propose alternatives and mitigation measures.

Because the NISP would impact federal waters and wetlands, building it requires the Army Corps of Engineers' approval under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

Now that the supplement report has been released, Northern Water can move forward with a second round of public hearings. Eric Wilkinson, the conservancy district's general manager, said Wednesday the report marks a milestone.

"It shows us that the project's feasible and very much needed by the participants," Wilkinson said.

The participants include the Fort Collins-Loveland and Central Weld County water districts, Morgan County Quality Water, and communities from Dacono to Windsor — a service area of about 225,000 people that could grow to more than 400,000 by 2050.

According to a survey conducted in July 2013 on behalf of the water providers proposing the project, 72 percent of voters in Larimer, Weld and Morgan counties surveyed showed support for the idea.

“We want to have good communications with people that are interested in this project,” Wilkinson said. “We know there are things this project can do to benefit the environment, including the Poudre River.”

When it comes to threats to the health of the Poudre River, however, project opponent Greg Speer says NISP is in a league all by itself.

“You couldn’t come up with a more disastrous project,” Speer said.

Speer, a Fort Collins resident, sits on the board of directors for Save the Poudre, which wants to see the NISP denied. Speer says by taking water from the Poudre River, flushing flows will be reduced and cause sediment to build up and pollutants to concentrate.

“It’s a nightmare, it really is. It’s like somebody who had torture in mind devised this project,” Speer said.

His group says water conservation is a better immediate solution for future supply issues, and would not be opposed to other options for water storage, including expanding existing reservoirs.

Additional Resources

From the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers:

The USACE, Omaha District is soliciting written comments on the NISP Supplemental Draft EIS from the public; federal, state, and local agencies and officials; Native American Tribes; and other interested parties.

Public Open Houses and Hearings for oral/written comments will be held on:

- July 22, 2015 at the Hilton Fort Collins, 425 W. Prospect Road, Fort Collins, and
- July 23, 2015 at the Weld County Administration Building, 1150 O Street, Greeley.

Open Houses will be from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. Hearings will begin at 6 p.m.

All written comments on the NISP Supplemental Draft EIS must be submitted by Aug. 4, 2015. Written comments should be submitted to:

John Urbanic, NISP EIS Project Manager
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Omaha District
Denver Regulatory Office
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Littleton, CO 80128
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