Report Takes Deeper Look at Dam Impact to Poudre River

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FORT COLLINS, Colo. (AP/CBS4) — A massive dam-building project in northern Colorado took a step forward with the release of an updated environmental assessment of the nearly $500 million project to establish two new reservoirs. But it could be years before the project can be completed.

The report calls for users of the Northern Integrated Supply Project to provide additional water to the Poudre River during low flows and build low-flow bypass facilities at key sites on the river through Fort Collins to help fish habitat.

The projects that would add millions of gallons of water to northern Colorado's reservoirs still remain years from realization, while Front Range cities lease water rights from agriculture to make up for water shortages.

As part of its assessment, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers studied riparian habitat, water quality, aquatic resources and hydrological modeling since 2009.

To build Glade Reservoir, about 5 miles of U.S. 287 north of Ted's Place in Larimer County would be rerouted.

The project calls for the Poudre River to be diverted during high-flow periods to fill Glade Reservoir northwest of Fort Collins and Galeton Reservoir, east of Ault.

"We're confident that with this we can help the river instead of hurt it," said Brian Werner, spokesman from Northern Water, which is spearheading the project on behalf of 15 towns and water districts along the Front Range.

Opponents of the plan say the new report doesn't ease their fears that new dams will destroy the Poudre and local wild areas. "This proposal is the same as it was before, and it would drain the Poudre," said Gary Wockner, executive director of Save the Poudre, an environmental group.

Northern Water released a statement that reads, in part, "The two proposed reservoirs are needed now more than ever, with so much water going downstream and out of state, the plan is to capture a portion of that water for use in Colorado's growing northern Front Range."