

Soapbox: Save the Poudre, Store water in Glade

July 17, 2015

Coloradoan

Opinion by Joe Rowan

As the saying goes, whiskey is for drinking and water is for fightin'!

The [Northern Integrated Supply Project \(NISP\)](#) is a perfect example of the axiom. Fifteen local communities have been fighting countless battles to secure the water our region will need to protect our environment, our agricultural heritage, our economic sustainability and our most precious natural resource — the Cache la Poudre River. Now it's time for the rest of us to stand in solidarity in support of this critical project.

In spite of its canyon stretch designation as Colorado's only federal Wild and Scenic River, the Cache la Poudre is one of the hardest working watersheds in the country. Long before any of us arrived, the river and the precious commodity it delivers, has played a unique role in defining Western water law and the evolution of complex delivery systems still in use today.

However, it must be noted that prior to the installation of water storage and diversion projects at the top of the basin, the river was reduced to a mere trickle by the time it reached its confluence with the South Platte by late summer of most years. It is disingenuous to suggest that development of our water resources has been detrimental to the river ecology and our collective enrichment. Quite the opposite. It's because our forbearers looked beyond their own generation in developing this magnificent resource that we have reason to consider the Cache la Poudre River a crown jewel.

Today, there are still locations where the Poudre is anything but a river during low-flow months, due to the series of municipal and agricultural diversions below the canyon mouth. But the proponents of NISP have committed to address this condition, as well. Through select removal and replacement of diversion structures, better coordination of water draws and river returns, and installation of bypass structures, the health and aesthetics of the river corridor will be greatly enhanced.

Sadly, there is an abundance of disinformation and prejudice clouding the conversation of the Northern Integrated Supply Project. While some have not yet taken the time to fully understand the scope and character of the proposal, others have willfully embraced guerrilla campaign tactics. Better to obfuscate fact and scientific principal than to be subjected to the harsh criticism an honest accounting of their "evidence" would certainly engender.

To be clear, there will always be credible disagreements over the scientific, economic and cultural impacts of any endeavor of this magnitude. In fact, we have a right to demand a robust airing of divergent points of view to the extent rational and informed discourse rules the day. We deserve a public dialogue driven by transparent motivations. Save the spurious sound bites for the clubhouse.

The fact is trade-offs will be necessary. We can continue to buy and dry farmlands, or we can capture excess flows during peak runoff periods. We can hold firm to the fallacy that additional storage will dry up the river, or recognize the project will actually enhance both the quantity and quality of riverflows year-round. We can suggest the rejuvenation of flushing flows will be lost, or accept that such events will continue to occur with our without another reservoir.

Save the Poudre. Store it in Glade!

Joe Rowan lives in Fort Collins.