

Water storage project closer to approval

Fort Morgan Water Advisory Board hears update on Northern Integrated Supply Project

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By Times Staff

The Northern Integrated Supply Project, a proposed massive water storage project, is moving closer to getting permitted, the city Water Advisory Board heard Tuesday, according to a city news release.

If NISP were to get built, it would offer water storage "that would greatly benefit the city of Fort Morgan," the release stated. Fort Morgan is one of 15 participants in NISP.

Now, NISP appears poised to move to the final stages of its lengthy permitting process, the city's Water Advisory Board heard Tuesday from Brian Werner of the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District.

Werner briefed the city water board on the status of NISP.

NISP has been in the planning and permitting process for more than a decade, which is not unusual for moving a water storage project through the federal and state bureaucracies it must navigate to gain approval, according to city officials.

Werner described the permitting process as one that moved "at a glacial pace."

But Werner said there appears to be light at the end of the tunnel. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has indicated that its Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement on NISP should be released early this summer, according to the release. That will be followed by a public comment period and several public hearings, and if those are completed on schedule a final EIS could be out by the end of 2016, he said.

NISP involves the creation of two reservoirs — 170,000 acre-foot Glade Reservoir northwest of Fort Collins, and 45,000 acre-foot Galeton Reservoir northeast of Greeley — as well as pumping stations and pipelines.

Together, the project would supply the participating providers — including the City of Fort Morgan and the Morgan County Quality Water District — with about 40,000 acre-feet of new, reliable water supply annually into the future.

The regional partnership participating in NISP includes 11 cities and towns and four water districts.

The population of Northern Colorado is projected to more than double by 2050, and NISP would provide crucial water storage to meet the needs of the growing population, the release stated. It would also provide an alternative to drying up agricultural land to supply that water, by capturing more of the water that is unnecessarily allowed to flow out of the state in wet years so it is available for Colorado water users in dry years.

A host of business and agricultural organizations, conservancy districts, chambers of commerce, elected officials and others have endorsed NISP, and polling by Ciruli Associates has shown that support for the project among Northern Colorado voters remains strong at over 70 percent, according to the release.

Werner said endorsements of the project continue to grow, and a strong support effort will be mounted among the NISP participants in advance of the public hearings later this year, according to the release.

Members of the Fort Morgan Water Advisory Board expressed continuing solid support for NISP and promised to attend and comment at the hearings.

To learn more about NISP, see how it would work and view the list of supporters, visit the Northern Water website at <http://www.northernwater.org/WaterProjects/NISP.aspx>.