

New NISP plan: Add to Poudre flows in Fort Collins

Coloradoan

April 29, 2016

Kevin Duggan

Proponents of building Glade Reservoir as part of a massive water storage project have devised a different way of moving its water to thirsty Northern Colorado communities while putting more water into the Poudre River through Fort Collins.

The proposal from Northern Water and participants in the long-sought Northern Integrated Supply Project calls for releasing about 14,000 acre feet of water each year from Glade Reservoir into the Poudre and running it through Fort Collins.

The goal would be to put more water in the river to benefit its ecosystem and aquatic life, said Brian Werner, Northern Water spokesperson. It would ensure minimum flows of 18 to 25 cubic feet per second, or cfs, in the river throughout the year.

The proposed change is in response to comments received from the public and local entities, [including the city of Fort Collins](#), about a supplemental draft Environmental Impact Statement, or EIS, for the project being reviewed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

“A lot of what we’ve heard was about having a healthier river,” Werner said. “This benefits the river.”

The move would do away with “dry up” spots on the river downstream from where irrigation companies divert water. Passage structures would be built near the diversions to allow fish to move up and down the river.

Water would still be taken from the Poudre River during times of peak flow and stored in Glade Reservoir, which would be built north of Ted’s Place at the intersection of Colorado Highway 14 and U.S. Highway 287. But the proposed release plan would address concerns about maintaining flows in the river, especially during dry years.

There is no “magic number” for flows that translates to a healthy river, said Jerry Gibbens, water resources engineer with Northern Water, but what’s proposed would be an improvement over current conditions.

“Eliminating these dry-up points and having a minimum flow above 20 cfs would have tremendous benefits to the aquatic habitat, and that’s really what we were going after,” Gibbens said.

NISP would yield 40,000 acre feet of water a year to participants. An acre-foot is about 326,000 gallons, enough to meet the water needs of three to four urban households for a year.

Northern Water announced the new conveyance plan during its annual water users meeting April 13. Conversations with local entities about the proposal have begun, Werner said.

Fort Collins officials are aware of the proposal but have not had time to evaluate it, said John Stokes, director of Natural Areas for the city.

Among the city’s concerns about the draft EIS was projected reduced flows on the river and the impact to aquatic life. Water temperature variations in the river was another issue.

The environmental group Save the Poudre, which has been fighting NISP for years, plans to carefully scrutinize Northern Water’s proposal before stating an opinion, director Gary Wockner said.

NISP project configuration modification

Adjusting plans for NISP is part of the EIS review process, Werner said. The Army Corps of Engineers, which has permitting authority over the project, is expected to release the final document for NISP in 2017. The EIS process [has been delayed numerous times](#) over the years.

Ken Kehmeier, a senior aquatic biologist with the Colorado Department of Parks and Wildlife, said the proposed operational change would improve conditions for aquatic life along the Poudre through Fort Collins.

“This is just one step, but it’s a big step,” he said.

More needs to be done to address conditions downstream, Kehmeier said, where water quality is a major issue.

Under the plan, water released from Glade would be diverted from the river near Mulberry Street to a pipeline that would connect with another pipeline from the reservoir carrying water to NISP participants.

The refined conveyance method is expected to add \$30 million to \$40 million to the price of NISP, Werner said.

But the 15 communities and water districts participating in, and paying for, the project told Northern Water to “go for it if it gets us closer to the finish line,” Werner said.

Find more information at [Northern Water's website](#), and the [Army Corps of Engineers' project page](#).

By the numbers

For Glade Reservoir and the Northern Integrated Supply Project, or NISP:

- **2:** Reservoirs in NISP; Glade, which would be built north of Ted’s Place, and Galeton, which would be built east of Ault
- **170,000 acre feet:** Capacity of Glade Reservoir, slightly larger than Horsetooth Reservoir
- **40,000 acre feet:** Projected annual yield to participants
- **15:** Northern Colorado communities and water districts participating in NISP
- **13 years:** Since the Environmental Impact Statement process for NISP began
- **\$17 million:** Spent on the EIS process so far
- **\$700 million:** Current projected cost of the entire project