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Windy Gap Firming Project Final Environmental Impact Statement Released

NORTHERN COLORADO – The proposed Windy Gap Firming Project achieved a significant milestone today with the release of its Final Environmental Impact Statement.

The FEIS, published by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, marks the last document in the project's National Environmental Policy Act review, which details the necessity for the project, the project impacts and the required mitigation.

The Windy Gap Firming Project is a regional collaborative effort among 13 growing Northeastern Colorado water providers who in 2050 face a population totaling more than double what it was in 2005. Water demand projections for the participants show a shortage of 64,000 acre feet in 2030 and 110,000 acre feet by 2050. Northern Water's Municipal Subdistrict is coordinating the review on behalf of the providers, who will pay for the estimated \$270 million project.

"The FEIS represents several years of commitment and coordination among many community water interests. This is a significant milestone toward making the Windy Gap Firming Project reality," said David Allen, deputy director of public works for the city and county of Broomfield – one of the 13 participating water providers.

The project's key feature, construction of Chimney Hollow Reservoir southwest of Loveland, Colo., would increase the reliability of the existing Windy Gap Project, which started delivering water to Front Range municipalities in 1985. Windy Gap's junior water rights status makes its supply unreliable from year to year, but with the reservoir, participants could use the same water rights more efficiently and expect 30,000 acre feet of water to be available each year.

Chimney Hollow Reservoir would be just west of and slightly smaller than Carter Lake and will be part of Larimer County's Open Lands Program, with non-motorized boating, fishing and trails.

The project has made other major inroads recently. This summer the state accepted the fish and wildlife mitigation plan, which includes considerations to reduce higher stream temperatures, requirements for sediment-flushing flows and nutrient removal to offset water quality impacts. The state also accepted the participants' voluntary enhancement plan to fund stream restoration work and habitat-related projects.

“We put a lot time and effort into developing these plans, and we’re proud to say that they will make conditions on the Colorado River better in the future than they are today,” said Jeff Drager, project manager.

The Municipal Subdistrict is also refining a voluntary working agreement with West Slope entities to provide additional benefits, including additional water for West Slope entities and for environmental and instream flow purposes.

The project awaits an official Record of Decision from Reclamation, which is expected in early 2012. It will also require permits related to construction, water quality and other issues.

The project participants are: Platte River Power Authority, Broomfield, Erie, Greeley, Longmont, Louisville, Loveland, Superior, Central Weld County Water District, Evans, Little Thompson Water District, Lafayette, and Fort Lupton.

More information about the project and a copy of the FEIS is available at www.chimneyhollow.org. Reclamation has an accessible copy of the FEIS posted at www.usbr.gov/gp/eca0.

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