Operations

As the Colorado-Big Thompson Project nears a half century old, considerable time and effort has been placed on updating and rehabilitating the Farr Pumping Plant. The Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District is presently in the middle of a program to modernize the plant. Efforts to date have included complete rebuilding of the pump motors, complete rewiring of relays, replacing of miles of electrical cable and wire, and installing new control and monitoring devices, among other things.

When the rewiring and modifications are completed, the Farr Pumping Plant will be one of the most efficient plants of its kind in the western United States.

The Farr Pumping Plant is operated and maintained by Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District personnel, is manned 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and employs 25 full-time persons. From the plant, all west slope collection system facilities and the Windy Gap Project are monitored, operated, and maintained. The Farr Pumping Plant offers daily tours during the summer months.

Lake Granby

Lake Granby is Colorado's second largest reservoir storing 539,758 acre feet of water at capacity. Only Blue Mesa Reservoir near Gunnison is larger. Construction of the Lake Granby dams began in the summer of 1946 with the first water stored in September 1949. There are 40 miles of shoreline and 7,256 surface acres when Lake Granby is full. On average, Lake Granby spills once every ten years. Lake Granby provides water supplies for Colorado-Big Thompson Project allottees in northeastern Colorado as well as numerous recreational, environmental, and aesthetic benefits to the Grand County area.
Farr Pumping Plant

The Farr Pumping Plant, previously known as the Granby Pumping Plant, is located on the north shore of Lake Granby. Referred to as the “Heart of the Colorado-Big Thompson System,” the Farr Pumping Plant lifts water 186 feet into the Granby Pump Canal where it flows by gravity into Shadow Mountain Reservoir. At Shadow Mountain Reservoir, water destined for Colorado’s northern front range and eastern plains flows into Grand Lake and then into the Alva B. Adams Tunnel to begin its 13.1 mile journey under the Continental Divide where it emerges at East Portal Reservoir west of Estes Park.

Construction of the Farr Pumping Plant began on April 6, 1947, and was completed on February 2, 1951. The plant was dedicated and the first water pumped on July 20, 1951. The Farr Pumping Plant is equivalent to a 16-story building in height. However, almost two-thirds of the reinforced concrete building is located below the normal water surface elevation of Lake Granby. The building houses three giant turbine pumps, each powered by a 6,000 horsepower motor, a complete machine shop, and a new control room where diversions through the Adams Tunnel are remotely monitored and controlled. Additional project operations including the Windy Gap Project are also controlled from the Farr Pumping Plant.

The Farr Family

The story of the Farr family in Colorado began when William H. Farr arrived in Greeley in 1876 and opened a blacksmith shop. For lack of the $60 necessary to buy a horse, he canceled plans to accompany Nathaniel Meeker to establish a community on Colorado’s west slope, and thus avoided certain death in the “Meeker Massacre.”

After travelling back to Ontario, Canada to marry his childhood sweetheart, William returned to homestead on the southern outskirts of Greeley, where he grew barley, oats, wheat, and potatoes. His potato shipping business to eastern cities helped him revolutionize Weld County farming practices.

William’s next significant contribution to the Weld County economy came about purely by accident. In 1891, he and his brother Walter were trailing a herd of sheep from William’s ranch on the Colorado-Wyoming border to Denver in early November, when a major three-foot snowstorm stranded them at William’s homestead. The sheep were fed throughout the winter and then sold in Denver that spring for a profit. William learned from this experience that sheep could be fed in the area. As a direct result of this incident, the lamb feeding industry in Weld County evolved and became important to the region’s economy for the next 40 years.

Harry W. Farr, William’s son, began working in the family businesses in 1907. The irrigated farming and lamb feeding industry was of great interest to him, and he became one of the largest lamb feeders in Weld County. In the 1930s, Harry became a strong proponent for the Grand Lake Project, which eventually became the Colorado-Big Thompson Project. He was an original member of the Grand Lake Committee, established by the Greeley Chamber of Commerce in 1933 to pursue the Project. Harry spent countless hours driving around northern Colorado promoting the Project in the early days when the support of the general population was so important to getting the Project off the ground. Harry’s son and William’s grandson, W. D. Farr, received his education in water resources as he accompanied his father and the other men promoting the idea of developing a supplemental water supply for northeastern Colorado. W. D. developed a long-range vision for water resources that has been his trademark.

As his grandfather and father before him, W. D. also had a hand in reshaping the agricultural economy in Weld County. When the lamb market began to dwindle, W. D. educated himself about the cattle industry, and before long had transformed the Farr business into one of the leading cattle producers in the state. Along with Warren Monfort, W. D. helped pioneer many of the feedlot techniques so widely used today. Owning and operating the LF Ranch south of Kersey and the 70 Ranch east of Greeley, W. D. shaped Farr Farms into a major player in the cattle industry.

Along with his other activities, W. D. has kept up his family’s lifelong interest in developing Colorado’s water resources. He was appointed to the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District Board of Directors in 1955 and has contributed his vision to the state of Colorado ever since. In 1970, he was selected as the first President of the Municipal Subdistrict, Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, and in that position was one of the leading advocates for the Windy Gap Project. W. D. still holds his role on both Boards today.

W. D.’s contributions are well known in both state and national circles. He was honored as Water Leader of the Year in 1985 by the Colorado Water Congress. In 1991 he was selected for induction into the Colorado Business Hall of Fame.