

Windy Gap Firing permit brings Chimney Hollow Reservoir one step closer to reality

The Berthoud Surveyor

January 3, 2013

By Kathleen Donnelly

As this year's drought continues, the need for water sources is becoming more apparent. The Grand County Commissioners approved a permit and several agreements to move forward with the Windy Gap Firing Project. Part of the Windy Gap Project is the Chimney Hollow Reservoir, which would provide future water storage for 10 municipalities, two water districts and one power provider.

"We are really excited about this next step," said Dana Strongin, Northern Water's communication specialist. "With the Grand County approval and permit agreement, that means the next step is the federal permits. We hope to move forward and in three years begin building so the reservoir is complete in 2018 and we can start filling it with water."

Part of the permit requires addressing environmental concerns. One of the main concerns is the trout population. Fishing is a large part of the economy, tourism and lifestyle on the Western Slope. Agreements made to help obtain the permit included improving river habitats.

"Biologists and other trout experts have worked a lot on this project and with these agreements have endorsed the project," said Strongin. "To help improve the fish habitat, water will be diverted that will keep the river healthy and the correct temperature. If a river is too warm then that affects the health of the fish."

Another agreement includes addressing the clarity of Grand Lake. All of these agreements mean that Colorado River water can be diverted through the Big Thompson Project facilities to eventually fill the Chimney Hollow Reservoir. The reservoir could serve as many as 825,000 residents by 2050.

"We don't have a place to keep the water. If Chimney Hollow was already built it could be half full by now and help with the demand," said Strongin. "With the drought, climate changes and population growth, the reservoir is a good answer. These negotiations began in 2009, so it's great that the details have been worked out. The negotiations have helped create cooperation and good will between all involved."

The proposed site for Chimney Hollow is west of Carter Lake next to Larimer County Open Space. The reservoir will be open to recreation managed by Larimer County.

"There will be non-motorized boating and fishing," said Strongin. "Motorized boating will still be allowed on Carter Lake, so that will provide a nice mix."

With the permit approval from Grand County, the next step is federal approval. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation will make an Official Record of Decision on whether the project should move forward and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will approve a permit to build. For more information visit www.northernwater.org.