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Colorado's Cache la Poudre listed as an endangered river

By GARY HARMON
The Daily Sentinel

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Colorado's Cache la Poudre River, the state's only wild and scenic river, is among the nation's most endangered, according to a listing by American Rivers.

The Northern Water Conservancy District is proposing a \$431 million, two-reservoir project that would receive much of the river's flow that now passes through Fort Collins.

American Rivers said the Cache la Poudre was the nation's third-most endangered river because of the project.

An anticipated influx of 40,000 new residents in the coming years will need the water that Northern hopes to capture in the reservoirs. Instead of looking to divert the river, officials should look for more responsible growth and efficiency and conservation to meet new needs, said Andrew Fahlund, vice president for conservation for American Rivers.

"We certainly can't support many of the proposals to take water from the West Slope and transfer it to the east side" of Colorado, Fahlund said.

Officials with the Colorado River District have been watching the proposal for the Cache la Poudre Basin "with interest," district spokesman Chris Treese said.

If it's built, the project should allow northeast Colorado to more efficiently use South Platte River water, Treese said.

"As such, it takes at least some pressure off the East Slope's always-covetous eye typically cast to the West Slope and the Colorado River's headwaters, which are already significantly over-tapped," Treese said.

Cities such as Denver, which was denied its Two Forks Dam proposal two decades ago, has nonetheless prospered without it, Fahlund said.

Water can be used more effectively, he said.

"People find a way," he said.

American Rivers said the project would cost almost \$1 billion over 30 years and divert 36 million gallons of water a day away from the river, "enough to fill an Olympic sized swimming pool every 8 minutes."

The fate of the project is before the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which is expected to release an

environmental impact statement on the project by the summer.

The nation's most endangered river, according to the organization, is the Catawba-Wateree River in North Carolina and South Carolina.

Other rivers listed by the organization are the Rogue River in Oregon at No. 2, the Gila River in New Mexico and Arizona at No. 7 and the Niobrara River in Nebraska at No. 10.

Daily Sentinel Publisher Alex Taylor is a member of the board of American Rivers.


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