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Commissioners split on Glade

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For Loveland Connection*

Fort Collins leaders' view of Glade Reservoir and the proposed Northern Integrated Supply Project is not likely to spill over to the Larimer County commissioners.

On Tuesday the Fort Collins City Council passed a resolution opposing NISP as it is currently described and proposed in a draft Environmental Impact Statement by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The council voted 6-0, with Councilman Wade Troxell absent.

Council members based their votes in part on research done by city staff members and paid consultants that highlighted a long list of concerns about how the project might affect the city and the Poudre River.

But the three commissioners' views on the controversial project are far from unanimous, Commissioner Randy Eubanks said Wednesday during a campaign news conference.

Eubanks said he supports the city's resolution and its concerns about the draft EIS. But he's not sure why commissioners Kathay Rennels and Glenn Gibson appear to support the project, which proponents say is needed to meet the future water needs of growing regional cities.

"If I'm a Weld County commissioner, this is a different decision for me," Eubanks said. "I'm a Larimer County commissioner, and I want to know from my fellow commissioners why this is the right thing to do."

In a telephone interview, Rennels said she generally supports NISP because of its potential benefits, including increasing flows on the Poudre during times of the year when it usually is dry.

But she said environmental concerns raised by Fort Collins and others would have to be addressed through mitigation in final plans for the project.

The commissioners still have to have "a very long conversation" about what comments to send to the Corps, she said. The issues are likely to be decided on up-or-down votes.

"There are some things we can all agree on, and there are some things we won't agree on," she said. "I think we need to look at this on a regional basis."

Gibson said he supports NISP for several reasons. It would supply growing cities with the water they need and take pressure off farmers to sell their water, he said.

Its potential benefits would stretch across Northern Colorado, he said.

"I think we need to also prepare for the future and the future is not just, Larimer County," he said. "It's the surrounding area, as well."

The three commissioners are still working with county staff members on comments they want sent to the Corps on a draft EIS. Comments are due Sept. 13.

Comments critical of the document offered for consideration by county-appointed boards have been ignored by the other commissioners, Eubanks said.

Public discussions on the comments have quickly bogged down and gone nowhere, he said. The comments proposed so far by county staff members have been insufficient and do not reflect key issues, such as the impact on agricultural lands if the project is not built.

Eubanks said he hopes his comments and those of the boards are included in the county's official response to the Corps. "This is our only shot to do this, so I want to make sure we do it right," he said.
