

North Forty News

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County commissioners hear Glade Reservoir concerns

By Cherry Sokoloski
North Forty News

Concerns about unsustainable growth and damage to the Cache la Poudre River were aired on July 9 when the Larimer County Commissioners held a public hearing on the Northern Integrated Supply Project.

The proposed water storage project, which would include Glade Reservoir northwest of LaPorte, would serve 15 communities and water districts in northern Colorado.

Several residents argued that more emphasis needs to be placed on conservation and water-sharing agreements with farmers, rather than building large storage projects. Others noted that few Larimer County communities would benefit from NISP, but the county would bear the brunt of the environmental burden.

Roger Hoffmann of Loveland, a candidate for the District 3 county commissioner seat, spoke against the project and said the commissioners' job is to "be sure the project does no harm to county residents."

The commissioners have scheduled a work session for Aug. 21, 9:30 a.m., to finalize their comments on NISP for the Army Corps of Engineers, permitting agency for the project. The meeting is open to the public, but there will not be an opportunity for public comment.

The Army Corps' public comment period for NISP has been extended by 45 days, to Sept. 13, due to the length and complexity of the draft environmental impact statement. The original deadline was July 30.

River health impacts

At the July hearing, Nancy York of Fort Collins expressed concerns about water quality in the Poudre if Glade is built, noting that lower flows in the river would result in warmer water and more sedimentation.

"As a culture, we have to look at alternatives and efficiency," she said. "I believe in extreme conservation, especially with water."

Mandy Kotzman of LaPorte called the Poudre River "a great asset worthy of protection." She said growth is not necessarily good and that farmers don't have to sell their water if Glade isn't built. She also cited concerns about climate change and the geologic faults that exist at the proposed dam site.

Several others stated that the arid West can't support the kind of growth experienced in northern Colorado in recent years. Glen Colton of Fort Collins said residents should "draw a line in the sand and say we're not going to continue to take water out of the river to fuel this growth."

One speaker suggested using gravel pits for storage instead of large reservoirs.

Kevin Gertig, who is in charge of water development for Fort Collins, said the city has not taken a position yet on NISP. However, he listed several "significant impacts" the project would have on the city, including lower water quality, greater demands on the wastewater system, and impacts on recreation.

Johannes Gessler of Fort Collins said that if NISP isn't built, those holding other junior rights on the Poudre would be able to seek permits to use water from the river, and the public might not have an opportunity to comment. Such a scenario, he argued, "might have a bigger effect than NISP on flow rates." He urged the commissioners to seek mitigations from the NISP partners, including minimum streamflow in winter months and an occasional "flood event" during spring runoff.

A minority of speakers at the July 9 hearing spoke in favor of NISP. Mel Hilgenberg of Fort Collins urged the commissioners to show "visionary leadership" and support the alternative that includes Glade Reservoir.

Oliver Richardson of Fort Collins added that the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, coordinator of the project, is very reputable and that NISP is in line with the "spirit of the agreement hammered out in the '80s about off-stream storage."

Brian Werner of Northern Water testified that NISP water is needed by growing communities along the Front Range and that NISP partners have already reduced their water consumption by 30 percent. The vast majority of agricultural organizations support NISP, he stated.

Werner also said that the NISP partners are open to looking at mitigations to lessen impacts on the Poudre River. When it comes to growth, he said, "It's better to prepare for it. Growth will happen whether or not NISP goes forward."

According to Rob Helmick, senior planner for Larimer County, the Army Corps will spend four to five months revising the draft EIS after the comment period ends. The agency will then issue a record of decision. If the Army Corps decides in favor of the project, the county will have one final look at NISP, at a location and extent hearing held by the planning commission.

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