

Environmental group lists Poudre among 'most endangered' rivers

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FORT COLLINS - A river advocacy group Thursday named the lower reaches of the Cache la Poudre River one of the nation's 10 "most endangered" rivers because of the Glade Reservoir proposal.

American Rivers ranked the Poudre as the third-most endangered river in the country. The Washington, D.C.-based group said the river is at risk because of "ill-advised projects in ... the nation's heartland" and that "those risks are only exacerbated by the problems created by global warming."

The group also stated "a collection of backwards looking decision makers all across the country are using 19th century thinking, in a misguided attempt to solve the 21st century problems we are facing as a nation."

"Water will be the oil of the 21st century," said Rebecca Wodder, president of American Rivers, in a news release. "Yet all across the country, water mismanagement is on full display as politicians resort to placing another straw in their rivers, or outright stealing water from their neighbors, instead of adopting water policies that will make our communities more resilient in the face of global warming."

In a telephone interview, a spokesman for the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, which has proposed the project, said Glade Reservoir would not damage the river as critics claim.

Minimum stream flows would be maintained through Fort Collins, said Brian Werner. As part of the project, more water could potentially be released through town during times when the river typically runs dry.

Conservation alone is not enough to meet the region's water needs, he said.

"They talk about the need for 21st century solutions for water," Werner said. "A true 21st century solution is a combination of conservation and water storage."

At a morning press conference on the Poudre near Legacy Park in Fort Collins, opponents of Glade said the designation represented a "sad" day for the city but also one of hope in that steps can still be taken to derail the reservoir.

"The fact is the river is not yet dead, citizens can speak out and make a difference, and we must do that," said Gary Wockner, spokesman for the Save the Poudre Coalition.

A draft environmental impact statement on the project is expected to be released April 30 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. A public comment period of at least 90 days will follow. The Corps will then decide whether to issue a permit for the reservoir.

Glade is part of the Northern Integrated Supply Project, NISP, which would store 40,000 acre feet of water for use by 15 communities and water districts participating in the project. An acre foot of water is enough to meet the needs of two urban families for a year.

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The project includes Glade and Galetton Reservoir, which would be built northeast of Greeley and draw water from the South Platte.

About the Poudre, American Rivers stated:

"Colorado's only Wild and Scenic River could soon lose much of its remaining water thanks to a scheme proposed by some decision makers to unnecessarily divert billions of gallons of water away from the Cache la Poudre," American Rivers said. "Such action could cripple Fort Collins, which has christened the river as one of the town's 'economic engines.' The proposed Northern Integrated Supply Project (NISP) would cost homeowners and taxpayers almost a billion dollars, and subject residents and future generations to the debt for 30 years. NISP would divert a staggering 36 million gallons of water a day away from the river before it reaches Fort Collins, enough to fill an Olympic sized swimming pool every 8 minutes."

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