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Glade debate continues as public studies EIS

**By Cherry Sokoloski
North Forty News**

Larimer County is suffering from a lot of eyestrain, as hundreds of people scour the 700-page environmental impact statement for the Northern Integrated Supply Project.

If approved, NISP would supply domestic drinking water for 12 communities and water districts. Construction could begin by 2011, according to Brian Werner of the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, which is spearheading the project.

The participants' preferred alternative includes Glade Reservoir northwest of LaPorte and Galeton Reservoir northeast of Greeley. Projected cost for the project is \$426 million.

NISP has been controversial, especially with environmental groups, and the EIS includes many possible mitigations to offset negative impacts. Chandler Peter of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, permitting agency for NISP, said if a permit is granted it will come "with a number of conditions."

The EIS lists four alternatives, including the "no action" alternative. The Army Corps is required to choose the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative.

The project is predicted to satisfy water needs of the partners until 2025 or 2030. Several partners are also pursuing other sources of drinking water.

The following issues are common concerns associated with the project and addressed in the EIS.

Streamflow

The project would affect streamflow on the Poudre River in two significant ways. First, NISP would exercise the Grey Mountain water right, allowing partners to pull water from the river during peak flow times in wet and average years. This is a junior right, so it could be used only when senior rights have been satisfied.

Second, an exchange would occur between water diverted from the Poudre River and water diverted from the South Platte River. This exchange would require diverting Poudre River water at the mouth of the canyon, rather than its present diversion point 23 miles downstream. The result would be a reduction in streamflow from the mouth of the canyon to about 12 miles downstream of Fort Collins.

With both factors operating, monthly streamflow through Fort Collins would be reduced in most months of most years, according to the EIS. The percentage of reduction at the Lincoln Avenue gauge in Fort Collins, near Ranch-Way Feeds, would be the greatest, ranging from 71 percent in May of average years to 26 percent in August of dry years.

NISP participants are working on possible mitigations to increase streamflow through Fort Collins. One would involve moving the diversion point for the Lake Canal Company.

Flushing flows

There has been much concern about whether the preferred project would still allow "flushing flows" on the Poudre. These seasonal high flows, sometimes called the "June rise," are necessary for scouring the riverbed, flushing out silt, recharging groundwater, maintaining wetlands and creating spawning habitat for fish. The Poudre typically peaks in mid-June.

Both Northern Water and the Army Corps insist that the project would still allow flushing flows. In fact, according to Peter, it's likely that the agency would require NISP to release flushing flows every few years if nature doesn't already provide them. This type of requirement was implemented with the Windy Gap project on the Colorado River. Peter also said the Corps could prohibit draws from the river unless the flow is at a certain level.

At the canyon mouth, according to the EIS, June flows would be reduced about 25 percent in average years and about 34 percent in wet years. In 1998, considered an average year, the average daily flow during June was 1,246 cubic feet per second at the canyon mouth. In 1999, considered a wet year (in fact there was some flooding), June's average flow was 2,064 cfs.

The "instantaneous peak" each year is always higher than the average June flow. For instance, the instantaneous peaks for 1998 and 1999 were 1,880 cfs and 5,822 cfs, respectively. The historic average on the Poudre for these instantaneous peaks is 3,030 cfs.

There are differences of opinion on what constitutes a flushing flow--in both

volume and duration.

The EIS states that high flows on the Poudre would be of less magnitude and shorter duration with NISP. However, major floods could still occur in the LaPorte stretch of the river.

If NISP is built, there would actually be fewer winter dry-ups along the Poudre at some points. This positive impact would result from changes in diversion points and an agreement from participants to curtail diversions to maintain minimum flows.

River character

The most significant impacts on the character of the river would be expected between Fort Collins and Greeley. With lower flows, more sediment would be deposited. As a result, vegetation would encroach on the river and on mid-channel gravel bars, resulting in a narrowing of the channel. This process is already occurring on the lower stretches of the river, and it would accelerate with the project.

Water quality

Peter said water quality in the Poudre River would be adversely affected by the project, because of lower flows and higher temperatures. Less water in the river means less dilution of contaminants, he noted. The EIS states that contaminants such as selenium could become a greater issue.

Wetlands are known to improve water quality. However, Peter said reductions in wetlands along the river as a result of the project were not considered when analyzing water quality.

Mark Easter, botanist and member of the Sierra Club Poudre Canyon Group, noted that the Poudre River below Fort Collins is already listed on the Environmental Protection Agency's "watch list" for poor water quality.

Recreation

The project would have both pros and cons for recreation. Because of a change in diversion points, more water would be flowing through the Filter Plant Run, so the rafting/kayaking season above the mouth of the Poudre could be extended into August. The EIS estimates increased revenue from this change to be about \$166,000 annually.

However, streamflow through Fort Collins would be reduced, meaning a shorter season for boating through that stretch. This change could harm the city's prospects for building a watercraft course near downtown Fort Collins. Revenues are estimated to drop by \$229,000 annually for the Fort Collins stretch of the river. The Poudre River Trail might be used less, because the river would be less aesthetically pleasing.

Glade Reservoir could provide a new resource for both fishing and boating, and the EIS estimates it could create annual revenues of \$17 million. Werner said both Larimer County and the state have shown interest in managing the reservoir for recreation.

While the reservoir level would fluctuate, Werner said the fluctuation would be "no more than at other reservoirs, like Horsetooth." Boat ramps, he said, could be placed at the deepest part of the reservoir, near the dam, to extend the boating season.

Cumulative effects

NISP isn't the only water project on the drawing board in northern Colorado, and the Corps is concerned about the cumulative effect of all projects. Fort Collins and Greeley, along with partners, are proposing to enlarge Halligan and Seaman reservoirs, both located on the North Fork of the Poudre River. Also, the Greeley water pipeline now under construction from Bellvue to Greeley will pull more water out of the river.

Peter said all projects are being considered together as they affect streamflow in the river. It's possible, he said, that the Corps could recommend that Fort Collins and Greeley join with NISP in order to reduce the impact on the river.

Other issues

Other concerns outlined in the EIS include the effects of global warming on streamflow, TCE contamination in the area of the proposed Glade forebay, and the presence of a geologic fault in the vicinity of the proposed dam.

The EIS suggests that fisheries in the study area would generally benefit from NISP.

For further information about NISP, the public may access the EIS at local libraries or online at www.nwo.usace.army.mil/html/od-tl/eis-info.htm. The deadline for submitting comments is July 30.

For articles about the effects of reservoir projects on the health of the Poudre River, go to the newspaper's archives at www.northfortynews.com/ArchiveList.htm and look for April and May 2006 and May 2007 issues.

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