

NISP in economic plan draws anger

Written by

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The Northern Integrated Supply Project has been included in a proposed state economic plan for Northern Colorado developed by Larimer and Weld counties, and Save the Poudre is unhappy the public did not have a chance to comment on its inclusion locally.

The plan, called the Bottom Up Economic Development Initiative, is being developed by the Colorado Office of Economic Development and Inter-national Trade. The office is inviting the public to comment on the plan through Friday.

"It's not clear what impact the economic plan will have, however, we feel that the public process was subverted in Larimer County, and we think it's important for the

Office of Economic Development to hear from the people," said Save the Poudre Director Gary Wockner.

Save the Poudre is one of NISP's loudest critics, claiming it will destroy the river through Fort Collins, a charge NISP supporters deny. If built, the project would siphon water from the Poudre River west of Fort Collins and store it in the proposed

Glade Reservoir north of the city.

The water would be used to quench the thirst of growing cities and towns south of Fort Collins while preventing the region's farmers from having to dry up their land to provide water for urban growth.

The state asked each county to come up with its own economic plan, which would be lumped into one of 14 regions, said Larimer County Manager Frank Lancaster.

Together, all the plans will make up an overall economic blueprint for Colorado.

"Our region was Weld and Larimer," and a committee of people from both counties met to create a single economic plan for the region, Lancaster said.

NISP never was discussed as the Larimer County economic plan was being developed and was not included in it, he said.

"That was inserted by the Weld County

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folks" into the regional plan, he said.

Lancaster said it's unclear what impact the regional economic plans will have on the state's economic policy.

Although the state is offering the plan for public comment this week, Wockner said there was no regional opportunity for comment on the addition of NISP into the regional plan.

The public was allowed to comment on the Larimer County plan, but "the joint plan I don't think ever went out for public comment," Lancaster said.

Save the Poudre has been sending emails to its members this week, imploring them to sign a petition before the state's public comment deadline Friday to have NISP removed from the regional economic plan. Wockner said more than 3,000 people had signed it by Wednesday afternoon.

In an email to members, he said the economic plan was created by "biased insiders who subverted the public process."

Lancaster said the state stipulated that the committee creating the county's economic plan include a local business person, an economic developer, a state staff person and a local elected official.

Representing Larimer County were Don Taranto of TST Engineering, Colorado Department of Local Affairs North-Central Region Manager Don Sandoval, Northern Colorado Economic Development Corp.

Interim CEO Don Churchwell and Larimer County Commissioner Lew Gaiter.

But, he said, Larimer County's committee was not responsible for inserting NISP into the regional plan.

"It just didn't come up," he said.

Meanwhile, at the suggestion of Fort Collins City Council member Gerry Horak, City Manager Darin Atteberry plans to send a letter to the governor outlining the city's concerns about NISP.

In 2008, the Fort Collins City Council unanimously passed a resolution opposing the project as it was then described in a draft Environmental Impact Statement.

The city's issues include the potential ecological impacts Glade Reservoir would have on the Poudre River as it flows through Fort Collins as well as water quality in the river and Horsetooth Reservoir.

A city-financed study predicted Fort Collins

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might have to spend millions of dollars upgrading its water and wastewater treatment facilities because of reduced flows on the river.

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