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Poudre River named one of nation's most endangered

By Pamela Dickman
The Reporter-Herald

The Poudre River today becomes the third Colorado river to be listed as endangered on an American Rivers annual Most Endangered Rivers list.

It is one of 10 rivers on the national organization's list — and currently the only one in Colorado — and was designated because of a reservoir proposal, the Northern Integrated Supply Project.

The project, if approved by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, would divert about 40,000 acre-feet of water per year into two new reservoirs, Glade and Galeton.

Opponents say removing that much water — 36 million gallons per day, or enough to fill an Olympic-sized swimming pool every 8 minutes — would dry up the river, which they say is the heart of recreation, wildlife, the economy and the downtown business community in Fort Collins.

“Everything that we have been saying for three years we're getting corroborated at the national level,” said Gary Wockner of the Save the Poudre Coalition.

“This is an endangered river, and the threat is real.”

However, a proponent of the diversion project said the project wouldn't make much difference in the Poudre.

The severity of the threat to the state's only federally designated Wild and Scenic River and the fact that a decision on a permit is expected within the next year led to the Poudre's ranking as the nation's third most endangered river.

“Pulling 40 acre-feet of water from a river that is already stressed by current diversions as well as global warming would just kill this river,” said Rebecca



Colorado State University students Patrick Kelly, left, and Dale Hernandez make water flow measurements in the lower Picnic Rock stretch of the Poudre River northwest of Fort Collins on Wednesday while on a field trip for a geomorphology class. Reporter-Herald/Steve Stoner

Wodder, president of American Rivers, a national organization formed in 1973 to work for healthy rivers.

“It’s just too much.”

A panel of experts chose the Poudre and nine other rivers from more than a quarter million rivers in the United States. In previous years, the Gunnison River and Animas River in Colorado have appeared on the list.

Opponents have been trying for three years to stop the reservoir project, which involves building the 180,000 acre-foot Glade Reservoir north of Fort Collins and the 40,000-acre-foot Galeton Reservoir near Ault.

They say water conservation is key to solving a water shortage, not pulling more water from the Poudre River.

However, the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, or Northern Water, argues that its plans won’t harm the river and will provide needed water to the 15 growing communities that are paying for the water storage project.

“If NISP isn’t built, the communities will still need water,” said Brian Werner, spokes-man for Northern Water. “It doesn’t mean the water isn’t going to get diverted. There are people lined up behind Northern Water to get that water.

“We’re vested in the region, so it makes sense for us to do it rather than a Thornton.”

The Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, based in Berthoud, cares about the ecosystem and the community and keeping water for agriculture and open land, Werner said.

The project would require the district to leave certain levels in the river, but at times the Poudre would run dry just as it does today, he said.

“The river is dried up,” Werner said. “It dried up in 1907 just as it is in 2008.”

In fact, Werner pointed to another national designation. In 1996, Congress listed the Poudre River as one of the best examples of a working river in the Western United States.

That, Werner said, will not change with Northern Integrated Supply Project.

He added, “Aesthetically, I will challenge people to note much of a difference.”

ON THE NET: For more information, go to www.ncwcd.org, www.savethepoudre.org or www.americanrivers.org.

Comments

Another fine example of humans claiming to know what's best for the environment by destroying ecosystems in the process. Diverting the water from the Poudre to build the proposed reservoirs is detrimental to the Poudre River ecosystem and the wildlife species that utilize the Poudre for their habitat and way of life because the river will dry up even faster than normal, disrupting the cycle of life that is present along the river. Fish will die off faster because water levels will lower earlier than normal. Animals that use the river to survive will be forced to look elsewhere for a drink of water because the Poudre will be dry. Isn't it about time that humans learn to conserve water before the rivers dry up for good? Snowpack levels in this state have steadily declined over the years, and even though Colorado is enjoying a great year for snow in 2008, there is no way to predict that snowpack will be sufficient to meet the grotesque growth that will certainly happen along the Front Range corridor (not to mention the rights of farmers downstream who will most certainly need the water for crops to supply food to the state and nation). I say shame on you to our leaders for not looking at real solutions to solve the problems that humanity is going to face when our resources have dried up.

Nick, Loveland, CO 4/17/2008 10:26:39 AM

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