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Review of reservoir along Poudre backs need for more water

By Michael Booth
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 05/01/2008 01:39:45 AM MDT

The Army Corps of Engineers on Wednesday agreed with backers of a massive reservoir project in northern Colorado that population growth calls for new water supplies and that if the plan is rejected, cities will dry up huge tracts of farmland.

But the corps also said the proposed diversion of Cache la Poudre River water from downtown Fort Collins and Greeley would be much larger than previously thought, and the reservoir would flood 50 acres of habitat for the endangered Preble's meadow jumping mouse.

With the release Wednesday of the 702-page draft environmental impact statement, critics and supporters of the \$426 million Northern Integrated Supply Project can weigh in with comments for at least 90 days. The corps eventually will decide whether to issue a permit for the project, and if so, what environmental mitigation to require.

Key to the plan is moving 7 miles of U.S. 287 to

make way for a 170,000-acre-foot Glade Reservoir northwest of Fort Collins.

The Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District was glad to see the corps point out that a "no action" alternative to the proposal would send cities scrambling to buy up farm water rights on their own, in a chaotic and expensive effort to supply population growth, said Brian Werner, spokesman for the district, which wants to build the project. "No action" would result in drying up 69,000 acres of farmland, or 11 percent of irrigated cropland in the region, the corps said.

"No action does not mean no action," Werner said.

Opponents of the project have focused on the diversion of peak spring and summer flows from Fort Collins to fill the reservoir. They said Wednesday that the impact on scenic parkland and wildlife habitat was even worse than they had expected, with Glade Reservoir taking away 71 percent of May runoff in the Poudre channel.

"This project will be very bad for the Poudre River. At first blush in the report, we see nothing in there that changes our opinion," said Gary Wockner, a local activist with the Save the Poudre coalition. The group has teams of scientists and lawyers combing through the corps' report, Wockner said.

One key protest, already anticipated by corps project manager Chandler Peter, will be a demand for more water conservation by the

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cities involved. Peter said the corps concluded the cities could not conserve enough water to meet their future needs.

Wockner and others will be demanding more proof.

"We believe the cities that want this water are not currently practicing maximized conservation," he said. "We're not anti-growth; we're not anti-dam or anti-reservoir."

"We're united to save the Poudre."

Michael Booth: 303-954-1686 or
mbooth@denverpost.com

Public hearings scheduled for Poudre project

The full impact statement can be found at
<https://www.nwo.usace.army.mil/html/od-tl/eis-info.htm>.

Two public hearings are scheduled:

- June 17 in Fort Collins at the Fort Collins Senior Center; 4 to 6 p.m., open house; 6 p.m., public hearing.
- June 19 in Greeley at the University of Northern Colorado University Center; 6 to 7 p.m., open house; 7 p.m., public hearing.

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