

Save The Poudre claims oil, gas exploration threatens water project

FEBRUARY, 28 2011
STAFF REPORTS

An environmental group has said the oil and gas boom in Weld County threatens one of the proposed reservoirs of the Northern Integrated Supply Project and said that will probably increase the cost and complexity of the project.

The proposed Galeton Reservoir, east of Ault, is part of the project which also includes the Glade Reservoir north of Fort Collins. The Galeton Reservoir proposes to store water from the South Platte River that will be used by two irrigation companies in exchange for Poudre River water that will go into Glade as a supplemental supply to several municipalities on the Front Range.

When the Environmental Impact Statement for the project was drafted, there was no mention of oil and gas wells, but, according to a news release from Save the Poudre: Poudre Waterkeeper, a Fort Collins-based group, there are currently six producing wells with several more permitted on the boundary of the reservoir.

Brian Werner is spokesman for Northern Water, which is the managing agency of NISP.

“We’re glad they’ve found oil and gas out there. Obviously, there will be a timing issue,” Werner said. But, he said, water officials have been in contact with Noble Energy, the company drilling the wells, for some time. He said while the oil and gas wells were not a part of the EIS, “it doesn’t have anything to do with our plans” adding horizontal drilling could be a possible solution to any problems that may come up once construction on the reservoir begins.

“We hope, in a perfect world, they (Noble) speed things up and have those wells tapped by the time we’re ready to start construction,” Werner said.

Gary Wockner of Save The Poudre said in an e-mail exchange, Chandler Peter with the Army Corps of Engineers confirmed that no environmental or cost analyses of the oil and gas wells have been figured into NISP. But he said a supplement draft EIS, which is due to be release at the end of the year, would contain that analyses.

The Army Corps of Engineers must approve the permit to build the water storage project.

“The presence of these wells will likely further increase the time, expense, and environmental complexity of the NISP permitting process as well as the project. We encourage all NISP participants to seek alternatives to NISP that would be cheaper, easier, and faster ways to secure their future water supply,” Wockner said in the news release.

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