

Denver Post: June 29, 2009

Guest Commentary by Sean Conway

Northern Colorado farmers need water project

Today in northern Colorado, we enjoy tens of thousands of acres of irrigated farm land that puts food on our table, and has made Weld County one of the most productive agricultural counties in the United States. All of this is due to the hard work and vision of those who preceded us.

In the 1930s, visionaries such as W.D. Farr and others led the effort to build the Big Thompson Water Project. This project today provides an invaluable supply of water to our farmers, ranchers and northern Colorado communities.

Over the last 30 years, the population of northern Colorado has more than doubled, yet no new significant water supply facility has been built. In addition, growing cities in the Denver metro area are looking north to find the water supply their communities need and they have the sights on thousands of acres of irrigated farmland in northern Colorado.

A recent environmental study showed that without a new significant water project, more than 100 square miles of currently irrigated farm land could be dried up. The result of this dry-up would be an environmental and economic disaster to northern Colorado.

After more than 20 years of planning and talking, the time has come for northern Colorado residents to support the Northern Integrated Supply Project (NISP).

The communities in Weld and Larimer counties seeking the permit from the Army Corp of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to construct NISP have effective water conservation programs and are among the lowest water use per capita in the state. The project will include two reservoirs: Glade and Galeton.

The proposed Glade Reservoir location above Fort Collins is off-stream and is not on the Poudre, as some opposing this project have insinuated. The project's location protects the Poudre River as a Wild and Scenic River.

The Galeton Reservoir and its pipeline from the South Platte River in Weld County, which is often the overlooked part of the NISP, will allow delivery of water for agricultural use to two ditch companies. This part of the project is critical to farmers and ranchers in Weld County.

We all know agriculture has been hit hard in recent years: first, by the drought of 2002, followed by the shutdown by the state of hundreds of agricultural wells in Weld and Morgan Counties, and finally by the recent closure of New Frontier Bank in Greeley by the FDIC.

If we are going to ensure that northern Colorado remains one of the most agricultural productive county in the United States, we must act. We need to stand up and support our farmers and ranchers by supporting NISP.

You can help in this effort by attending a lunchtime rally in support of NISP on Tuesday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Leffler Farm on Weld County Road 74. The farm is one and three- quarter miles west of Eaton off U.S. Highway 85 and 13 miles east of I-25 from the Harmony Exit.

Come join us as we rally for the future farmers and ranchers of northern Colorado.

Sean Conway is a Weld County commissioner.



Farmer Frank Eckhardt of La Salle examines one of his dry sugar-beet fields in this 2006 file photo. (*Hillary Wheat, Greeley Tribune*)

http://www.denverpost.com/opinion/ci_12709516