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By Kevin Duggan

Farmers rally in support of Glade Reservoir

Supporters say project protects agriculture's future

EATON - Invoking images of the past and future, supporters of the proposed Glade Reservoir rallied on Tuesday saying the controversial project is needed to protect agriculture in Northern Colorado.

About 300 people attended the rally sponsored by the Colorado Farm Bureau and the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, which has proposed building Glade as part of the Northern Integrated Supply Project, or NISP.

A series of politicians and representatives of farm associations told the crowd that without the water-storage provided by the Colorado-Big Thompson Project, which includes Horsetooth Reservoir, Weld County wouldn't be one of the top agricultural producers in the country and the region wouldn't enjoy such a high quality of life.

The foresight that went into building the Big Thompson project is needed now, said Weld County Commissioner Sean Conway.

"Today is our generation's turn to step up to the plate," Conway said. "It's our generation's turn to say: We're moving forward; we're going to do something for our children and our grandchildren; and we're going to build NISP."

Glade would be built north of Ted's Place and draw from the Poudre River, primarily during times of high flow in the spring and summer. The reservoir would be larger than Horsetooth Reservoir and would hold 170,000 acre feet of water. An acre foot is enough water to meet the annual needs of one or two urban families.

The project would provide 40,000 acre feet of water a year to the 15 regional municipalities and water districts that would pay for its construction.

Fort Collins is not a participant in NISP. The Fort Collins-Loveland Water District, which serves portions of the city, is a participant.

NISP would also include Galeton Reservoir, which would be built near Greeley and draw from the South Platte River. Water from Galeton would be piped west to ditches operated by irrigation companies in an exchange for water from the Poudre.

Supporters say the project is needed to meet the water needs of growing communities. Without additional storage capacity, municipalities would dry up farms by buying their water, supporters say.

Opponents of NISP say the project would damage the Poudre's ecology and only fuel growth that would consume thousands of acres of agricultural land.

John Leffler, whose farm west of Eaton played host to the rally, said growth is going to come with or without the reservoir.

"You need to be ready for growth when it comes - that's what this project would do," he said. "But growth for growth's sake alone is something I'd be against myself."

Farmers would not get "one drop of water" from NISP, said Gary Wockner, spokesman for the anti-Glade group Save the Poudre Coalition, in a telephone interview.

The project also would result in poorer-quality water for farms served by the irrigation companies.

"NISP and Glade will fuel the destruction of the farm economy and farm culture in Northern Colorado and Weld County," he said.

But NISP supporters said farmers wouldn't back the project if they thought it would harm their lifestyles and crops.

"This project doesn't work without those ditch companies," said Brian Werner, spokesman for Northern Water in an interview. "It behooves to make sure they have the quality of water they need to farm with."

Longtime Weld County farmer Bob Sakata told the rally agricultural producers have been able to survive all manner of difficulties, including drought, hail, wind and crop diseases.

In order to protect agriculture and food production, projects such as NISP need to be built, he said.

"Society must recognize that we can do without all the luxuries that are before us, but we cannot survive without food," he said.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is conducting a supplemental draft environmental impact process for the project that is expected to be complete next year.



Larimer County Commissioner Tom Donnelly speaks to the crowd Tuesday during the Farmers for NISP Rally at Leffler Farm, west of Eaton. Donnelly is accompanied by his children, Jack 8, and Cate, 1. (*Miranda Grubbs/The Coloradoan*)



Larry Stewart, right, of Eaton prepares a lunch plate Tuesday during the Farmers for NISP Rally at Leffler Farm west of Eaton. Rally participants enjoyed a barbecue while listening to farmers and elected officials speak in support of Glade Reservoir. (*Miranda Grubbs/The Coloradoan*)

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