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By Pamela Dickman

Support flowing for NISP **Advocates rally behind project**

EATON — The large metal shed surrounded by growing fields of corn on the Leffler family farm usually houses farm implements and machinery in need of repair.

Tuesday, instead of the sounds of farm machinery, irrigation water and farm animals, more than 250 people filled the shop with applause and rallying cries in support of a proposed water supply project.

Area farmers, politicians, government workers and residents gathered to show public support for the Northern Integrated Supply Project, a cooperative effort by several cities and water districts to divert water from the Cache la Poudre River to the proposed Glade Reservoir. The project, hotly contested by a Fort Collins group, is before the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for a second environmental assessment.

The message, sown strongly by speaker after speaker Tuesday, was that the water project, which would be managed by Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, is essential to the survival of agriculture — one of the main industries in the region.

Without the reservoir to store water for growing cities and towns, that burden would fall onto water currently set aside for agriculture — and farm acres would dry up, hitting the economy and local food supply, according to area farmers and spokesmen for farm agencies.

“In an arid state like this, water and food production go hand in hand,” said Don Ament, retired lawmaker, farmer and former head of the Colorado Department of Agriculture. “With all this rain we’ve had, wouldn’t this have been a time to fill a reservoir?”

He added, “If we don’t store water for growth, that water is going to come from agriculture.”

Opponents of the reservoir project, a coalition called Save the Poudre, argue that the proposal would dry up the river and with it the Fort Collins economy, vital riparian habitat and farmland.

In a statement released earlier this week, the coalition said the reservoir would immediately dry up 100,000 acres of farmland plus thousands more each year, dealing an \$85 million per year blow to the economy, according to figures from scientists and economists.

The farmers at the rally scoffed at that argument.

Troy Bredekamp, executive vice president of the Colorado Farm Bureau, said Glade Reservoir would actually save 40,000 to 60,000 acres of farmland and \$27 million in production per year.

“Without this project, there will be an accelerated dry-up of thousands and thousands of acres of farmland,” added Mark Sponsler of Colorado Corn Growers Association, “You can quibble about the numbers of acres, but what matters is they’re going away.”

That threat is what spurred Leffler to give up a morning of farm work during prime farming season to host the rally in support of Glade Reservoir.

“The demands on our water to go to the big city to the south are real,” Leffler said. “If we can have this project, that keeps our water in Northern Colorado. A lot of business people are involved because they don’t want to see farmland dry up.”

NISP in a nutshell

What is Northern Integrated Supply Project, commonly called NISP? The Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District (a Berthoud-based taxing district also called Northern Water) wants to build two reservoirs to store water from the Poudre River to serve 15 cities, towns and water districts.

How big and where would the reservoirs be? Glade Reservoir, the largest at nearly 180,000 acre-feet, would be built across the current route of U.S. 287 north of Fort Collins. Seven miles of the current highway would be relocated to the east, and the reservoir would flood that stretch of the road. Galeton Reservoir would be built east of Eaton and hold 40,000 acre-feet of water.

How much would the project cost? \$450 million.

Who would pay for it? The 15 towns, cities and water districts, most in Boulder and Weld counties, that would receive the water. Neither Loveland nor Fort Collins is participating.

Arguments in a nutshell: Proponents say Glade Reservoir north of Fort Collins wouldn’t hurt the environment or the local economy but would in fact help it while meeting future water needs. Opponents say taking more water from the Poudre River would hurt the fish and wildlife, the city’s economy because industry and recreation rely on the river, and water quality for the city.

Where can I get more information? Online at www.gladereservoir.org (proponents) and www.savethepoudre.org (opponents).



Colorado State Rep. Jerry Sonnenberg, R-Sterling, back right, is joined onstage by Weld County Commissioner Sean Conway, left, and former Colorado Agriculture Commissioner Don Ament as he speaks to participants at a rally Tuesday afternoon on the Leffler family farm outside Eaton in support of the Northern Integrated Supply Project.

Reporter-Herald/Steve Stoner

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