

Water Review

A Perspective On Western Water Issues Prepared By The Family Farm Alliance And Its Members

COLORADO

Storage Projects Can Alleviate Pressure To Transfer Ag Water

The Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District was created 70 years ago to bring a project online that would aid a faltering farming economy in northeastern Colorado.

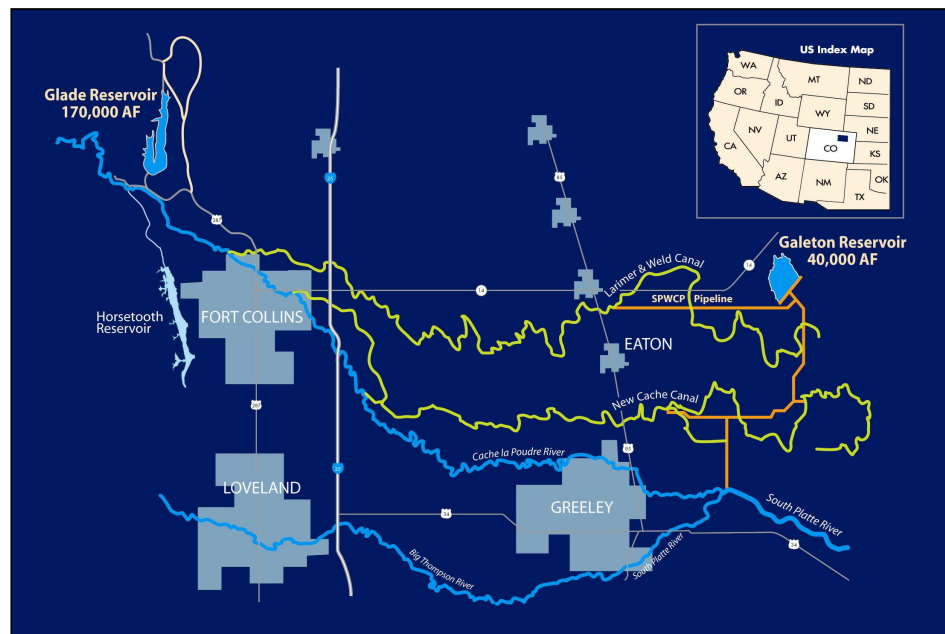
Decades later, the organization is planning another project that stands to prevent thousands of acres of farmland from being dried up.

NORTHERN WATER was formed in 1937 to contract with the federal government to build and maintain the Colorado-Big Thompson Project. One of its purposes was to deliver supplemental water to irrigators and towns, and is in large part responsible for making northern Colorado the state's No. 1 producer of agricultural products.

While a lot has changed since the 1930s – Northern

Water now supplies that supplemental water to 33 municipalities and 750,000 residents as well as more than 100 ditch and reservoir companies – agriculture is still an important part of Northern Water's mission.

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Map courtesy of Northern Water

Northern Water: Storage Is A Big Solution

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Project water still irrigates an estimated 693,000 acres of productive farmland.

However, the rapid transfer of agricultural water to municipal uses places northeastern Colorado squarely in the middle of one of the West's most pressing issues.

COLORADO LOSES AN AVERAGE of 690 acres of farmland per day. The State of Colorado predicts that, unless other water is made available, northeastern Colorado's South Platte Basin could lose up to 225,000 acres of farmland in the next 25 years. This could have a devastating impact on the economy and viability of Colorado's rural communities.

Water providers must invest in the development of new supplies to avoid excessive transfers of agricultural water for the needs of growing urban communities.

Northern Water is leading the way in the South Platte Basin by developing new storage projects that minimize impacts to the environment, are cost-effective and do not rely on transfers from irrigated agriculture.

THE NORTHERN INTEGRATED Supply Project is a partnership between Northern Water and 15 municipalities and water districts to develop 40,000 acre-feet of water for their future. NISP will combine traditional water supply infrastructure, including more than 200,000 acre-feet of new storage, with innovative agricultural water-sharing agreements.

By providing an alternate way to meet future water demands, this partnership will reduce the need to transfer water from agriculture in northeastern Colorado, without limiting farmers' rights to sell their water. NISP's agricultural

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The future Glade Reservoir site, shown here looking south towards Horsetooth Reservoir, will hold 170,000 acre feet of new municipal water supplies. The needed land, which US Highway 287 bisects, is mostly owned by Northern Water and has been leased for grazing for many years.

Northern Water: Proposed Glade Reservoir

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exchanges will generate almost two-thirds of the project's yield.

Farmers in northeastern Colorado have used the Poudre River to grow crops for more than a century. They will voluntarily provide some of this water to the NISP partners, who will place it into the planned Glade Reservoir.

IN EXCHANGE for placing water into Glade Reservoir, the farmers will receive an equivalent amount of water from the new Galeton Reservoir. By exchanging their historic Poudre River diversions for water from Galeton Reservoir, the farmers will help fill Glade Reservoir with high-quality water for municipal use.

Of course, farmers who participate will be compensated for their willingness to partner with NISP. Incentives may include financial compensation, ditch and canal upgrades, and assistance replacing aging infrastructure. Northern Water will also monitor water quality to ensure the farmers receive water of adequate quality for their crops.

NISP will meet growing urban water needs while also maintaining water for agricultural purposes. Its construction will slow the dry-up of irrigated farmland in northern Colorado and could protect 25,000 acres of farmland from water

transfers. Many northern Colorado residents greatly value agricultural lands.

They are a rich part of Colorado's history, a vital part of the state's economy and provide open space and wildlife habitat. For these reasons, projects like NISP that provide an alternate water supply for future demands are crucial.

MORE INFORMATION on the Northern Integrated Supply Project can be found at www.ncwcd.org, including a short informational video about the project.

In addition, you can contact Nicole Seltzer, Public Affairs Coordinator for Northern Water, at (970) 622-2277 or www.nseltzer@ncwcd.org.

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