

FACTS: The Windy Gap Firming Project

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What is the Windy Gap Firming Project?

The Windy Gap Firming Project will provide water to 13 communities and water districts in Northeast Colorado. The Northern Water Municipal Subdistrict is coordinating the project, and the future users are paying all costs.

The project is a “firming” project because it will “firm” the yield to the existing Windy Gap Project by adding necessary storage. Windy Gap uses facilities of the Colorado-Big Thompson Project to transport water to Northeast Colorado for municipal use.

The firming project will use Colorado River water rights that the Municipal Subdistrict filed in the 1960s and 70s. It will not divert any more water from the Colorado River than the amount allowed under those original water rights. The project will provide dedicated reservoir storage to make water deliveries more reliable.

Why is the firming project needed?

When Windy Gap was constructed in the 1980s, water users knew that additional storage would be necessary in the future. During dry years, senior water rights on the Colorado River must be satisfied before Windy Gap can divert water. In wet years, Lake Granby can often be too full to accommodate Windy Gap water, making it impossible to store water for Windy Gap use.

Several years ago, the Municipal Subdistrict started looking at ways to improve the reliability of Windy Gap water. After extensive review, the Municipal Subdistrict determined that the best solution was to construct Chimney Hollow Reservoir on the East Slope.



Chimney Hollow site

Chimney Hollow will be a 90,000 acre-foot reservoir just west of Carter Lake, southwest of Loveland. The site for Chimney Hollow, in addition to

adjacent land, was part of a joint purchase by the Municipal Subdistrict and Larimer County Parks & Open Lands. The reservoir will offer fishing and non-motorized boating, and the open space will offer trails and habitat for wildlife and connect to tracts of open space to the west.



Has water conservation been considered?

The firming project participants have in place proactive, progressive water conservation programs that have collectively reduced their per capita water usage by 26 percent since 1988. They achieved these goals through management of both supply and demand.

On the demand side, all municipal project participants are 100 percent metered, and most use an increasing block rate structure. Household water use has decreased through a range of measures, including limits on outdoor watering and requirements for water-efficient fixtures.

Supply-side management included leak detection and repair, pipe replacement and lining, additional monitoring and improvements to wastewater facilities.

The participants will continue their efforts, in part because it makes financial sense. Conservation lowers the cost to treat and distribute drinking water supplies.

For more information

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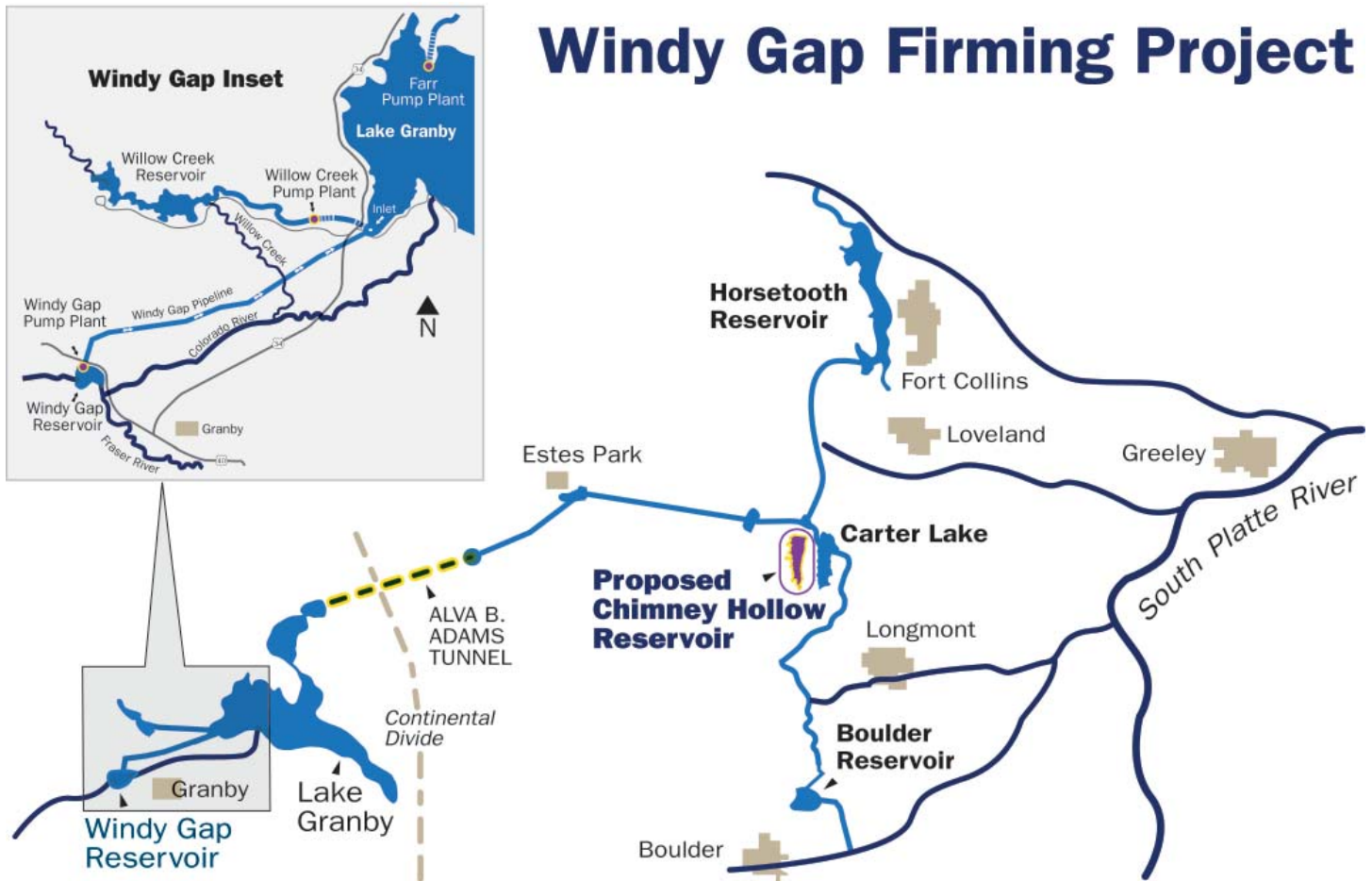
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How is the West Slope affected?

The original Windy Gap Project involved careful consideration for the West Slope environment. When Windy Gap was built, the Municipal Subdistrict gave the West Slope a large mitigation package, including \$10.2 million to the Colorado River District to help build Wolford Mountain Reservoir and \$550,000 for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect endangered fish species.

The firming project will cause reduced streamflows on the West Slope, but the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the project notes that measurable impacts to fish populations are not expected.

For the firming project, the Municipal Subdistrict has offered to provide flow and other enhancements that go well beyond the legally-required mitigation. The offer includes opportunities for Grand County to improve water quality, including the clarity of Grand Lake.

The Municipal Subdistrict also recognizes that recreation on Colorado-Big Thompson Project reservoirs has contributed significantly to Grand County's tourism revenue. The firming project will not change this.

Project timeline

What's happened so far

- The Municipal Subdistrict began the federal permitting process for the firming project in 2003.
- The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation released in 2008 the draft of an Environmental Impact Statement that analyzes the impacts of the selected alternatives.
- Reclamation solicited public input on the draft EIS and closed the comment period in December 2008.

What's next

- Reclamation publishes the final EIS by spring 2010.
- Based on the final EIS, Reclamation releases its decision on the project by summer. If it is approved, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will grant a permit to build.
- Chimney Hollow Reservoir design and construction will take about five years.

The firming project is the most effective way to provide the additional storage that Windy Gap water users need. Instead of each of the water providers building its own storage, the firming project takes a collaborative approach with one reservoir for all. This minimizes cost and impacts.