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Farm purchase part of NISP effort to ensure water-secure future for local communities and agriculture

The recent purchase of a Weld County farm marks a new venture for Northern Water and Northern Integrated Supply Project participants – one that’s part of the ongoing, collaborative effort to secure future water supplies for both the region’s communities and our vital agricultural industry.

On Jan. 31, Northern Water and the NISP participants purchased a 28-acre farm northeast of Greeley and the property’s water rights. The farm was purchased through the NISP Water Secure program, a cooperative effort to maintain the exchange of water for NISP while keeping water on participating farms. This investment is a shift from the “buy-and-dry” approach that has stressed our agricultural communities.

This innovative program will eventually provide supplemental water to approximately 500,000 residents in northern Colorado while preserving thousands of acres of irrigated farmland. Water Secure is part of a strategic long-term plan to better plan for future growth and to consistently apply Colorado Water Plan principles to protect water for our communities, farms and the environment. Without innovative approaches such as Water Secure, the region is on pace to see hundreds of thousands of irrigated acres dried up by mid-century.

“This is an outside-the-box, ‘buy-and-supply’ approach we’re taking to address the tightening water supplies facing Northern Colorado and its future generations,” said Northern Water General Manager Brad Wind.

The recently purchased farm sits within an area of Weld County that is key to NISP – a project that, once built, will include Glade Reservoir near Fort Collins and Galeton Reservoir near Ault, and deliver approximately 40,000 acre-feet of water annually to 15 local communities and water districts.

As part of the project, Northern Water and the NISP participants are working with the New Cache la Poudre Irrigating Company and Larimer and Weld Irrigation Company ditch and reservoir systems in Weld County, to use a portion of their senior water rights in exchanges that will ensure the NISP participants receive the water from the project.

These exchanges with the two systems will keep water flowing to those farms, as well as include compensation that will enhance the long-term viability of their operations.

To avoid water leaving those farms permanently through buy and dry purchases from other entities, Northern Water will buy land and water from willing sellers to ensure those supplies remain in the two ditch systems and available for exchange.

The senior water rights in the New Cache and Larimer-Weld systems are currently among the most sought after by water providers looking to obtain future supplies.

Farms in the New Cache and Larimer-Weld systems bought by Northern Water will remain in production, through limited land use easements on the property, lease-back agreements or other arrangements that will require continued irrigation on those farms.

Furthermore, the purchase of any irrigated lands will be done with the goal of eventually returning them to private ownership.

“The Water Secure program maintains irrigated agriculture and provides open space benefits while eliminating many of the long-term challenges with the practice of buying and drying,” Wind added.

To learn more about NISP, go to www.gladereservoir.org.