Remarks Prepared for Presentation by
Gilbert G. Stamm, Commissioner of Reclamation
at the Pathfinder Dam Recognition by the
Wyoming Chapter of the American Society of
Civil Engineers
Pathfinder Dam, Wyoming
July 17, 1975

It is indeed a pleasure for me to accept on behalf of the Bureau of Reclamation this plaque presented by the Wyoming Chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers recognizing Pathfinder Dam as a Wyoming Civil Engineering Landmark.

Pathfinder is one of the first four or five dams built in the West by Reclamation—and the first on the North Platte. Its construction on the Wyoming frontier shortly after the turn of the century presented innumerable challenges to the engineers in the fledgling Reclamation Service.

Construction of the dam was a hazardous undertaking. In addition to the problems involved in
quarrying the granite from the nearby hills, transporting 55,000 barrels of cement to this remote location and mixing it with 60,000 cubic yards of aggregate, the builders had to contend with several major floods.

The most damaging came in 1909 during construction of a dike to close a gap on the right abutment. The spring runoff became a deluge; the water rose almost to the top of this low stretch and threatened to cut a new course for the river—leaving the nearly completed dam sitting in a dry canyon.

A Casper newspaperman-historian, Alfred Möckler, described the situation this way:

"Men and teams worked night and day for several weeks, piling brush, wood, and sacks of sand and dirt in the low place. The floodgates were turned wide open and arrangements were made to blow out a section of the dam with dynamite if
the water could not be otherwise prevented from running over the low land.

"For 3 or 4 days it was a hard struggle between the men and teams and the gradual rise of the water, and at one time it was thought there was no hope except to blow out a section of the masonry in the dam.

"Just at this time, however, seemingly an act of Providence, the water commenced to recede and then all danger was passed."

So fortunately, Pathfinder Dam was completed in 1909—at a cost of slightly more than 2 million dollars.

Yes, construction of Pathfinder Dam and other facilities of the North Platte Project was indeed
an engineering feat worthy of recognition. But it was much more than that. It was one of the wisest investments this country has ever made in its future.

The total cost of all of the Federal facilities in the North Platte Project has been less than 37 million dollars. More than 23 million dollars of that cost has already been repaid to the Federal Government by the users. At the present rate of repayment, most of the project costs will be paid off in a few more years.

In return for that 37 million dollar investment, this area, this region, and the Nation have been reaping many millions of dollars worth of benefits each year. In 1974 alone, 130 million dollars worth of crops were harvested from lands served by the North Platte Project—more than three times the cost of the original investment. The
cumulative crop value over the years totals one billion, 385 million dollars.

In 1974, the North Platte Project provided enough food to satisfy the needs of 911,000 people. In addition, it has been providing flood control since the breach in the dike was closed following the 1909 flood; and last year alone it produced 32 million kilowatt hours of nonpolluting, non-fossil-fuel consuming hydroelectric power.

While its recreation potential is nowhere near fully developed, Pathfinder Reservoir drew nearly 100,000 visitors last year—and its use by recreationists will undoubtedly continue to grow.

These figures which I am citing concerning the benefits which have resulted from construction of the North Platte Project are particularly pertinent and much of the world are today when the nation is facing problems of food and energy shortages and economic distress.
There are many short-term remedies which can and should be taken to combat inflation and boost the Nation's economy. But none of them has the beneficial long-term impact that results from the wise development of our natural resources. It is as true today as it was in 1905, when construction began on Pathfinder Dam, that this Nation grows where water goes.

Let me leave you with one final set of figures illustrating the importance of this Wyoming Civil Engineering Landmark on the economy of Wyoming.

A recent study by the University of Nebraska indicates that for every dollar's worth of crops produced, the economic benefit to the area and the State amounts to seven dollars and ninety-five cents.

On that basis, the 1974 North Plate Project crop production added one billion, and thirty-seven million dollars to the area's economy.
That's not a bad annual return on an investment of less than thirty-seven million dollars.

We in the Bureau of Reclamation are proud of the facilities we build, facilities such as Pathfinder Dam. We accept with pleasure the tributes we receive for our craftsmanship. But the primary goal of Reclamation is not the building of monuments to our profession.

The facilities we build are merely the means to an end. Pathfinder Dam is more than a civil engineering landmark. It is a landmark in the history of Reclamation's continuing efforts to help meet the needs of people--today, tomorrow, and far into the future.

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THE WYOMING SECTION OF
AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CIVIL ENGINEERS
has designated
PATHFINDER DAM
as a
WYOMING HISTORIC CIVIL ENGINEERING LANDMARK

PLAQUE PRESENTATION
Thursday, July 17, 1975
11:00 a.m. at
The Pathfinder Dam
PATHFINDER DAM

Pathfinder Dam, constructed by the Reclamation Service during the 1905-1909 period, stands today as a symbol of the civil engineer's contribution to the development of Wyoming and the West, and to the profession of Civil Engineering in particular.

Pathfinder Dam allowed man to control and manage the once wild North Platte River for the survival of man. The initial functional purpose of supplying irrigation water for 335,000 acres of desert land in Wyoming and Nebraska is still being performed as efficiently today as when the project was first conceived. In addition the structure also helps to produce electrical energy, control floods, and provide significant fish and wildlife and outdoor recreational opportunities for the people of the basin and the Nation.

The civil engineers who planned, designed and constructed Pathfinder Dam were creative artists, going beyond science to design a truly beautiful structure... a structure that exemplifies beauty in order, symmetry and functionalism. In addition, they were true conservationists in that they were concerned about the long term uses of our limited resources and not exploiting the earth for short term profit.

The Wyoming Section of American Society of Civil Engineers hopes that this brief review of America's past accomplishments will make us all aware of a distinguished heritage and feel part of a fine tradition. Let us profit from the experiences of our predecessors and build upon their achievements.
Presentation of Colors

Introduction and Greetings

Welcome

Historic Significance of Pathfinder Dam

Award Presentation

Acceptance

Retirement of Colors

Troop 13 - Sponsored by First Christian Church of Casper

Verne E. Smith
President
Wyoming Section ASCE

Robert L. Pettigrew
Mayor of Casper

Edness Kimball Wilkins
State Representative

David G. Wilde
History & Heritage Committee
Wyoming Section ASCE

Gilbert G. Stamm
Commissioner
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
WYOMING SECTION
AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CIVIL ENGINEERS

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Ralph D. Asbridge
Project Manager, North Platte
River Projects Office
Bureau of Reclamation
Mr. Gilbert G. Stamm  
Commissioner of Reclamation  
Commissioner's Office - Washington  
Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Reclamation  
"C" Street between 18th & 19th Streets, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Stamm:

I am delighted that you will be able to attend the dedication of Pathfinder Dam as a Wyoming Historical Civil Engineering Landmark and accept the plaque.

Plans and arrangements are firmed up for the ceremony at 11:00 a.m. on July 17. If you will let me know when you plan to arrive in Casper we will be happy to provide transportation and any other assistance that we can.

Sincerely,

Verne E. Smith  
President, Wyoming Section

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