Slump at Fontenelle Dam is Not Dangerous

A slump on the upstream face of Fontenelle Dam occurred about 2 a.m. on May 7, 1985, leaving a scarp nearly 12 feet high, it was announced by Upper Colorado Regional Director of the Bureau of Reclamation Clifford Barrett. The slump, which is not dangerous, is approximately 150 feet east of the spillway and extends approximately 95 feet toward the east. In addition to the scarp, a minor crack extends an additional 1,000 feet eastward near elevation 6,463.

Reclamation officials feel that the slump is the natural result of water pressure within the right abutment and embankment being eased as the reservoir level drops, and is not considered a hazard. Minor slumping was considered as a potential when the decision was made to rapidly lower the reservoir.

Increases in releases in increments of 1,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) began May 1 when unusual readings were detected in monitoring devices located near the center of the dam. Releases were eventually increased to 12,000 cfs in order to evacuate the reservoir as quickly as possible without causing damage to downstream developments.

Lowering the reservoir has reduced the pressure readings on the instrumentation at the dam. On May 8, with the reservoir at elevation 6,451, releases were cut back to 7,600 cfs. Flows are being continually reduced as necessary to prevent air in the vortex area (whirlpool) from...
entering the outlet works. The reservoir will continue to be drained until it reaches about elevation 6,435. At that time, Reclamation personnel will evaluate the information available. If the instruments continue to read normal, the reservoir may be raised to provide sufficient reservoir capacity to maintain minimum downstream releases and reservoir pool to protect the fishery resources.

Reclamation is currently negotiating a contract for construction of the test section to determine the best method and approximate cost of the complete repair and restoration of the dam. Reclamation has been authorized funds of $5 million this year to construct the test section.

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