Fontenelle Reservoir Drawdown Temporarily Halted to Preserve Fish

Fontenelle Reservoir drawdown has been temporarily halted to preserve as many fish as possible without jeopardizing the safety of the dam, it was announced today by Regional Director Clifford Barrett of the Bureau of Reclamation. The drawdown may resume, however, after conditions at the dam have been evaluated.

Reclamation officials became concerned when dead fish were seen in the river downstream from the dam. "From the beginning of this process, we were concerned about the potential impacts on the fish, but our first concern had to be the safety of the dam," Barrett said. Fishery and hydrology specialists are now investigating the situation to determine the cause and magnitude of the fish kills.

Hovering around elevation 6,443 feet above sea level, the reservoir will now fluctuate only slightly as inflows increase from the spring runoff. Reclamation will try to maintain releases about equal to inflow. Current releases from the reservoir are at about 4,000 cubic feet per second (cfs), but that will increase as inflow rises.

Although the snowmelt runoff down the Green River has not yet peaked, snowpack measurements indicate that the river will peak at about 7,000 cfs, which is well within the channel capacity downstream.

Since April 30, releases of water into the Green River through the dam have been kept high to lower the reservoir, hence reducing water pressure
Fontenelle Reservoir Drawdown, cont.

within the dam. "Instrument readings show that seepage pressure within Fontenelle Dam has considerably lessened with the reservoir drawdown," Barrett said. "We are confident now that the dam can hold the reduced amount of water without risk."

Currently, the reservoir contains only 32,900 acre-feet of water out of a capacity of 345,400 acre-feet when full at elevation 6,506. It is now about 35 feet deep at the dam.

Geologists and engineers from the Bureau of Reclamation have carefully monitored seepage through the dam since abnormal amounts were detected in 1982. An extensive network of instruments were imbedded into the dam to measure the seepage pressure. It was one of these instruments, called a piezometer, that indicated an unexplained rise in seepage in late April and early May 1985, and which led to the order to lower the reservoir as quickly as possible. As of May 14, this particular piezometer reading had returned to an acceptable range.

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