A FAR-reaching landmark plan to upgrade the man-made environment at Grand Coulee Dam and Powerplant in Washington State has been presented to Federal, State, county, and community leaders by the Bureau of Reclamation. Not yet a finished blueprint, the plan was undertaken 2 years ago by the firm of Kenneth W. Brooks, AIA, of Spokane, Wash., under contract with the Bureau of Reclamation.

It represents a major effort by the Bureau of Reclamation to point up the needed and potential improvements for the total environment of the dam and surrounding area—to meld the natural beauty of the area and its unique geologic history—to make a showplace of man's ingenuity and skill and the wonders of nature.

The proposed plan goes far beyond anything which could be undertaken exclusively by the Bureau of Reclamation, and will require participation by many agencies and communities if it is to succeed. Such groups have membership in a Grand Coulee Dam Advisory Council, which hopefully, will function in a leadership manner in reviewing and coordinating such aspects of the program as are agreed upon and may be undertaken.

Harnessing the flow of one of the world's great rivers, the Columbia, the awesome 4,173-foot-long Grand Coulee Dam has been a popular public attraction since it was first undertaken in 1933. Construction is now underway on a third powerplant, which will ultimately extend over 1,000 feet downstream from the right abutment of the dam. Excavation for the new powerplant and forebay dam is a bigger job than excavation for the original structure.

U.S. Canada Co-op

The third powerplant was made possible by practical upstream storage on the river and its tributaries in the United States and Canada. Presently authorized are an additional 3,600,000 kilowatts of capacity, which will be supplied by six great turbogenerators, each possessing 600,000 kilowatts of capacity—the largest in the world. A second bank of six similar turbines and generators will be possible at a later date, when authorized by Congress, giving a total project and installed ultimate capacity of 9.4 million kilowatts.

This will make the project once again one of the largest hydropower installations in the world. It is expected to be an even greater magnet for tourists and sightseers from all parts of the world,
and the environmental plan is designed to place the manmade wonder in a suitable setting.

The Brooks environmental study could, when implemented, make a visit to the Grand Coulee area one to be long remembered. Contemplated as the major Bureau of Reclamation contribution to the effort is a double tour circuit of the gigantic dam and powerplant, one of riding and one of walking, including visits to the inner recesses of the new powerplant.

This would be provided by an extraordinary outside inclined elevator from the crest of the forebay dam down to the third powerhouse, which was conceived by the world-renowned architectural firm of Marcel Breuer and Associates of New York City. A minitrain is envisioned to carry passengers around exterior areas.

A distinctive aerial cable car is proposed to carry visitors on a breathtaking ride from an arrival center downstream from the dam on the left bank to an exhibit center and museum on the scenic hillside high above the river. The hilltop provides an expansive view upstream of Franklin D. Roosevelt Lake, downstream toward Chief Joseph Dam, and westwardly to Banks Lake and the spectacular Coulee, carved out when an ice dam turned the river south many thousands of years ago. The bluff also offers an unexcelled view of Grand Coulee Dam, including the third powerhouse.
Hilltop Museum

To make the most of the hilltop, it is possible that a museum will be established there incorporating three phases: the geology of the area; the early history of Man, telling the story of the early migrations across Bering Strait from which many anthropologists believed the Indians came; and the history of modern Man.

The Brooks report envisions sweeping lawns and landscaping which would be utilized as a natural stage for sports events, pagentry, summer symphonies and other cultural events.

An extensive lighting operation is proposed to dramatize the flow of energy from the great generators.

One of the challenges is to improve and develop the community environs beyond the jurisdiction or authority of the Bureau of Reclamation.

Recommendations for industry and community development including areas reserved for “21st Century” industry; development of an electric power research center, which is already under discussion; possibly an academic center; reserve the town of Coulee Dam West as the first model town; improve Coulee Dam East with emphasis upon a greenbelt and park atmosphere; restore living and service community.

The report suggests the Federal and State governments pool resources to build a modern shoreline village of permanent housing, easily convertible to vacation use at Banks Lake. All of Banks Lake would be utilized as a “unique experience” in recreation, camping, and relaxation. The lake has 100 miles of remote canyon shoreline and white sand beaches. The west bank would be available only by boat with campsites planned in such
a way as to be hidden and inaccessible by road.

A unique community high school is proposed. It would also be available for use as a convention center in summer. Existing high schools would be converted to elementary use.

The Bureau of Reclamation expects to cooperate and participate with the planning and development within the limits of the Federal jurisdiction, confined primarily to the physical structure of the dam and contiguous areas. The community challenge is to join in improving the approaches, the business areas, and the visitor accommodations in keeping with the natural beauty of the area.

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Right. Nature's creations are plain, but artistic.