From: Mike McMeans [mailto:delmike@comcast.net]
Sent: Wednesday, January 19, 2011 3:29 PM
To: Holwegner, Paula
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Subject: COMMENTSHEET for Bighorn Lake Draft Operating Criteria 1 18 2011

COMMENT SHEET

Bighorn Lake Draft Operating Criteria Informational Meeting January 4th, 2011

January 18, 2011
O. Michael and Vicky L. McMeans
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Narrative Comments:

My wife and I live on the Bighorn River and are extremely concerned with the radical and unstable flows that have been coming form the dam operations over the last three years. The Draft proposal, which to a degree has somewhat been in affect over those years, does not address nor did it look at any issues or problems below the dam.

The fast and high releases and the subsequent quick slowing of the releases from the dam over those three years has caused us to loose 400 feet of river bank. Our barbwire fence is now hanging suspended over the river due to the river bank we lost in one area.

Because of this dam operation we have had to acquire 310 permits to rip rap our river bank to stop this erosion. This rip rap is costly and we pay for it entirely ourselves.

Due to the lack of storage space for water coming into the dam from the Wyoming side, the discharges from the dam in to the Bighorn River in the spring have been in excess of 12,000 csf. This rapid and high water releases gives no opportunity for the river banks to absorb the water slowly. This causes the banks to become very unstable. Then the flows have been dropped at a very fast rate, in order to retain a high water level in the dam. This aggravates the unstable banks making them slough off into the river. This sloughing off creates huge sediment and environmental issues downstream along with costly property destruction.

When I brought the point up of high releases quickly and very fast slow downs of the releases at the January 4th meeting Lenny Duberstein said that issue was never considered. He stated he understood the principal because the irrigation ditches are also affected with fast build ups and fast slow downs of the water in them. The BOR raises the water level slowly and then lowers it slowly in the ditches to protect the banks. Why would the BOR not apply the same procedures and criteria used for protecting the ditch banks to protecting the river banks?

What surprises me is that no one with property on the river was ever asked to comment on the effects of the dam operations. This process has been on going for years and not one of our neighbors or we were contacted about this process. No one from the BOR ever did a survey of the river to see what the conditions are below the dam. Flooding is one of the major reasons for the dam's existence and I would think that those who are most at risk would figure into the operational equation somewhere.

Because of the lack of storage space in the dam over the last three years we have experienced water flows in excess of 12,000 cfs. Instead of decreasing the amount of water that the dam can retain in May and June, as proposed in this plan, it needs to be increased to protect down river properties and lives. If managed correctly the flows from the dam should not exceed 6000 cfs at anytime. Property owners on this river rely on the operation of the dam to protect them from flooding. .

The flooding of Black Canyon the past two years is an additional issue to be addressed. The canyon is a very popular recreation area and has been unusable for most of the past two summer seasons. The picnic tables and bear boxes were destroyed the first year, only to be replaced then removed the following year when it flooded again. The campground finally became fully usable at the end of boating season.

We are also concerned about the ill effects this plan has on the fishery below the dam. This is a world class fishery that needs to be protected. There are channels filling in with sediment that are prime fish hatcheries. The levels of extreme water flow are detrimental to the health and breeding of fish on the river. The economy of the Bighorn River Valley depends greatly on the tourism the fishing brings here. The high river flows of the past few years have hurt many of the businesses in this area.

We ask that you consider the issues below the dam with as much merit as those above the dam have been.

Respectfully;

Mike and Vicky McMeans

Sent via email to pholwegner@usbr.gov on 1/20/2011

Cc: D. Haacke
F. Johnson

File: Bighorn Dam commentsheet 1 18 2011