

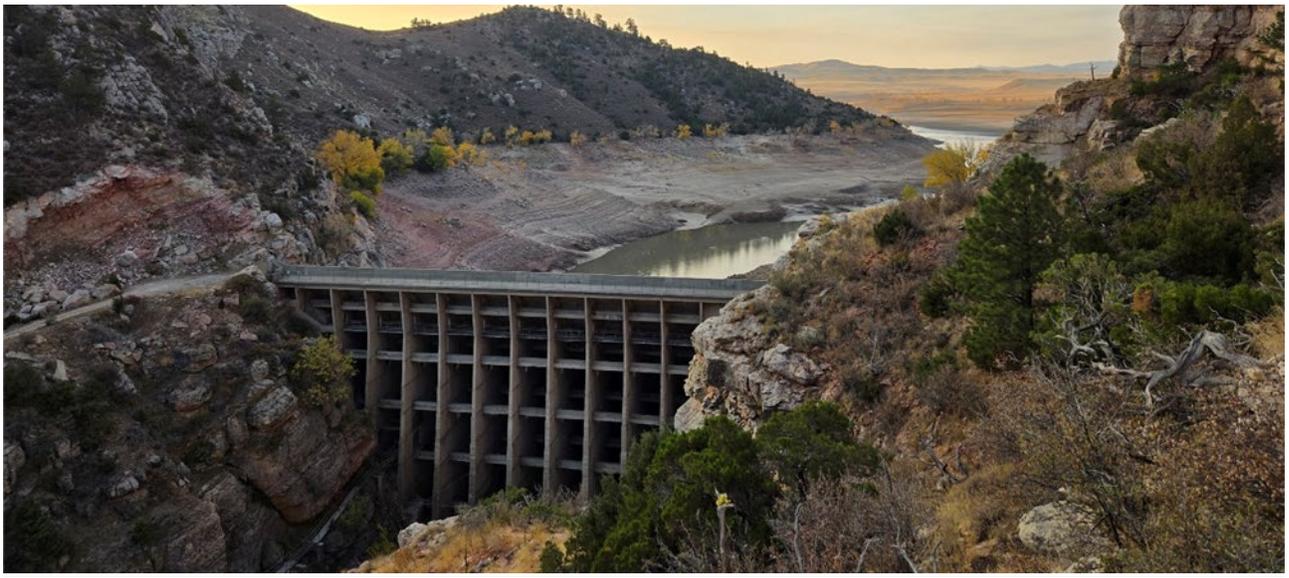


— BUREAU OF —
RECLAMATION

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

LaPrele Dam Reconstruction Project

FONSI # WYAO-2025-02



Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Missouri Basin Region
Wyoming Area Office

February 2026

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PROPOSED ACTION

The Proposed Action would include construction of a new Roller Compacted Concrete (RCC) dam, approximately 200 feet downstream (north) of the demolished dam. The replacement dam would be designed to meet current engineering, dam safety, and design standards and guidelines. A full pool would be reached at an elevation 5,492.65 feet (North American Vertical Datum of 1988 [NAVD88]) with a storage pool of 20,000 acre-feet, which is equivalent to the historic storage capacity behind the original dam.

The Proposed Action also includes associated infrastructure and site modifications necessary to support the construction, operation, and maintenance of the new dam. These activities would occur within the defined Project area, which includes all areas of temporary and permanent disturbance.

LaPrele Dam is not a Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) facility or project. Reclamation is the lead federal agency because the project is federally funded through Reclamation as directed by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), Title IX- Western Water Infrastructure, Section 4094(b) (Public Law 117-58, Statute 135).

BACKGROUND

LaPrele Irrigation District (District) is proposing this Project with support from the Wyoming Water Development Commission (WWDC) and Reclamation. The District, formerly known as the Douglas Reservoir Water Users Association, provides agricultural water service to over 100 users irrigating 11,462 acres of land in Converse County, Wyoming. Waters from the reservoir have been delivered to users via several canals and diversion ditches for irrigation, domestic, and industrial uses. Until fall 2024, the District provided this service through operation of the LaPrele Dam (Dam) and LaPrele Reservoir on LaPrele Creek. The District owned the former Dam, which has since been demolished, and would also own the proposed replacement dam.

The former Dam was an Ambursen slab-and-buttress style dam with reinforced concrete slab sloping upwards at 40 degrees from horizontal and supported by 16 buttresses. The Dam was a 135-foot-tall structure with a crest length of 320 feet, providing 20,000 acre-feet of storage. LaPrele Creek is a tributary to the North Platte River, located approximately 23 miles downstream of the Project area, or approximately 10 miles measured directly.

Construction of the former Dam was completed in 1909. The Dam showed early signs of structural deficiency following its construction and had several repairs and updates made over the years. Repairs and modifications were made in the 1920s to address leakage problems and a rehabilitation project was completed in 1979 to address deficiencies of the dam. Continued deterioration of the dam resulted in restriction of water storage in the reservoir beginning in 2019 and the reservoir was drained in October 2024 after discovery of new cracks.

The Wyoming State Engineer's Office (WYSEO) determined the Dam was an immediate threat to life and property and issued a Breach Order on November 1, 2024. The Breach Order required that the Dam be removed to an elevation of 5,400 feet by no later than April 1, 2025, when inflows from spring runoff could exceed the dam's ability to pass inflows and fill the reservoir. At the District's request, the required post-breach top of the remaining dam structure elevation was raised by 3.5 feet to 5,403.5 feet National Geodetic Vertical Datum of 1929 (NGVD29) to allow the remaining structure to serve as a cofferdam and for storage of water that can be used for construction (such as for concrete mixing, modifying soils for compaction purposes, or dust control). Low flows from the impounded water could then bypass the new dam site through a 54-inch pipe to allow for construction "in the dry."

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENTS

Environmental protection measures will be established prior to construction and implemented by all construction personnel. The measures are intended to minimize or eliminate the environmental effects associated with the proposed demolition of the Dam. These measures will be identified and the following permits obtained by the District prior to construction activities:

- Section 404 Individual Permit; for discharge of dredged or fill material in Waters of the U.S;
- Section 401 Water Quality Certification for discharge of dredged or fill material in Waters of the U.S;
- Wyoming Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (WYPDES) Large Construction Permit and Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) for Compliance with Clean Water Act - Section 402;
- Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, Air Quality New Source Review Permit or permit waiver for the concrete batch plant;
- Wyoming Office of State Land and Investments, Non-roadway Easement and Temporary Use Permit for construction on or across state lands;
- Wyoming Department of Transportation, Oversize/Overweight Permit for oversize and/or overweight vehicles on state highways;
- Converse County Flood Plain Construction Permit and
- Converse County Roadway Use Agreement.
- A pre-construction raptor and eagle nesting survey would be conducted within 0.50 miles of all proposed ground disturbance to assess the status of nests. If active nests are identified, they may need to be removed due to proximity to the location of the new dam, requiring a United States Fish & Wildlife Service Nest Take Permit prior to removal in compliance with the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and Migratory Bird Treaty Act.
- If there is an inadvertent discovery of cultural materials, construction around the discovery will be halted and Reclamation will be contacted.
- If human remains are discovered during construction, work will be halted within 100 feet of the discovery until the Reclamation archaeologist can be contacted and arrives on site.

DECISION

Under the Proposed Action Alternative, Reclamation would approve funding of the Proposed Action, outlined below:

1. Initial work on the replacement dam would begin with site preparation and excavation. Excavation would be completed using bulldozers, excavators, backhoes, and dump trucks. Other equipment used for dam construction would include generators, graders, concrete mixers, haul trucks, vibratory compactors, and cranes and lifts.

Drilling would be conducted to support multiple construction activities. This includes drilling for blasting to remove rock in preparation for excavation, as well as drilling for anchors and other stabilization measures as part of rock bolting efforts. Additional drilling would be performed to install foundation drains below the dam, grout holes in the foundation to reduce seepage, and geotechnical instrumentation for ongoing monitoring.

All blasting and drilling activities would comply with applicable safety standards and regulatory requirements. Best management practices (BMPs) would be implemented to minimize potential impacts such as noise, vibration, and dust. Notification procedures would be followed to inform adjacent landowners and land managers, as appropriate. The replacement Dam would be an RCC dam with a parapet height of 5,524 feet, matching the height of the former dam. RCC is used for mass concrete applications like those commonly used in dam construction. RCC is a stiff, zero-slump concrete that is drier than conventional concrete. It is typically placed in successive 12-inch horizontal lifts using conveyor belts or dump trucks and then spread by bulldozers. After the concrete is poured, it is then rolled with vibrating compactors, similar to what is used in roadway construction to achieve the required density and strength.

2. The Project would use two staging areas, previously established for the separate Demolition Project. The Upper Staging Area would be near the junction of Ayres Natural Bridge Road (County Road 13) and the existing road to the Dam. This area would be used primarily for vehicle parking, temporary office trailers, fuel storage, and a concrete batch plant. The Lower Staging Area would be north of the new dam site on the west side of the existing Dam access road and would serve the same functions as the Upper Staging Area. Both staging areas are located on a combination of private and State of Wyoming land.
3. Contingent on project approval, construction of the new Dam would begin in Spring 2026 with excavation of rock in preparation for the Dam foundation. Construction activities during 2026 would include installing the concrete batch plants, placing a grout curtain for the Dam foundation, and performing other preparatory work necessary prior to concrete placement. The concrete work for the Dam would occur in 2027 and the dam would be completed and operational by spring 2028.

Construction hours would vary depending on the season and specific construction activities. Generally, earthwork and excavation would occur during daylight hours, while temperature-sensitive activities, such as concrete placement, may be conducted overnight during summer months to ensure optimal curing conditions. The construction contractor may implement a shift-based schedule during critical phases, but 24-hour/7-days-per-week operations are not currently planned.

4. Following Dam reconstruction, the District anticipates the reservoir would likely fill during spring runoff of the following season and operate as a “drain-and-fill” reservoir. A full pool would be reached at an elevation 5,492.65 feet (North American Vertical Datum of 1988 [NAVD88]) with a storage pool of 20,000 acre-feet, which is equivalent to the

historic storage capacity behind the original dam. Water will be released from behind the dam through a cone valve directly onto a concrete apron.

Anticipated operations and maintenance activities conducted by the District are expected to include:

- Regular inspection of the dam structure, valve house, and spillway
- Maintenance of permanent access roads
- Operation and exercising for all valves and gates
- Routine instrumentation data collection and analysis

Additional maintenance tasks, such as cleaning of foundation drains and maintenance of the outlet works intake structure, would be conducted on an as-needed basis.

Maintenance personnel would typically access the site for maintenance via the Northern Access Road. Frequency of site visits is expected to vary seasonally, increasing during spring runoff and irrigation periods. In winter months, snow plowing may be required to maintain site access.

5. During scoping, the Northern Arapaho Tribe requested a tribal monitor during ground disturbing work. Reclamation is committed to consulting with tribal entities to protect cultural resources.
6. Upon completion, all temporary disturbance areas would be reclaimed to approximate pre-construction conditions to the extent practicable with the exception of the Southern Access Route below the ordinary high-water mark (OHWM) that will be abandoned and inundated by the refilled reservoir. The staging areas, including the concrete batch plant footprints, and Southern Access Road would be fully reclaimed to their pre-project states.

Post-construction monitoring would be conducted to determine the success of upland restoration and seeding. Monitoring would assess native seed establishment, erosion control success, and streambank recovery. The District would coordinate with Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (WDEQ) and United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to determine monitoring requirements and any required adaptive management or additional treatments (e.g., reseeded, erosion repairs, bank stabilization).

Based on the analysis presented in the environmental assessment, Reclamation concludes that a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is appropriate, and an environmental impact statement is not needed because:

1. The Proposed Action would involve minor but permanent impacts to geologic resources. Excavation of geologic resources for making concrete would reduce the overall availability of these resources. However, this material would be a small proportion of the material available in the area so the impact would be negligible. Bedrock within the Project area where the dam would be constructed would be permanently impacted by the excavation required to ensure a stable foundation for the dam, spillway, and drain components. However, this impact would be localized and have a minor impact on the geomorphology at this location.

2. The Proposed Action would not affect interstate water right compacts within the region, including the 2001 Modified North Platte River Decree between Nebraska and Wyoming (NDNR 2001) and the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program between Colorado, Nebraska, and Wyoming.
3. The Proposed Action is anticipated to have minor to moderate short to long-term impacts on water quality. BMPs, as coordinated with WYDEQ and USACE, and required by their respective permitting mechanisms, would be used to prevent and mitigate water quality impacts during construction.
4. No permanent impacts to air quality from the Project are anticipated, as emissions would be minor, temporary and limited to the construction period only.
5. No impacts to emergency services are expected as the increase in vehicle traffic would still represent a low volume of vehicle trips and no closures of roads are anticipated. As with any major construction project, the presence of construction personnel and equipment could temporarily increase the potential need for local emergency services to respond to emergencies associated with construction. Impacts on local healthcare facilities would be able to manage minor increases in demand during construction due to the low number of workers anticipated.
6. Long-term noise impacts would result from the operation of the dam, as the operation of the dam and occasional maintenance activities would increase ambient noise levels. However, these noise levels would be constant and relatively low, and due to the distance to sensitive receptors, these impacts would be minor.
7. The Proposed Action is anticipated to have minor impacts on visual resources within the Project area and surrounding landscape.
8. Positive permanent impacts to public recreation from the Proposed Action would include regulated flow regimes downstream of LaPrele Reservoir similar to what recreators experienced prior to the demolition of the Dam. The Project would result in minor temporary impacts on access to recreational activities in the area.
9. Minor and temporary impacts to grazing activities during construction are anticipated because of disturbance from construction equipment and reduced forage on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and state of Wyoming grazing allotments. Following the completion of the proposed new dam, the reservoir would be capable of storing the originally designed 20,000 acre-feet and irrigation activities could resume to pre-2019 levels.
10. No permanent impacts to vegetation are expected as temporary disturbance areas along the Southern Access Road, concrete batch plants, parking area, and staging areas would be restored with recontouring and reseeding of temporary disturbance areas once construction of the Proposed Action is complete. Only minor temporary impacts are anticipated.
11. The Proposed Action would have minor and temporary impacts related to the spread of noxious weeds. Ongoing monitoring and treatment of new or worsening noxious weed infestations by the District will prevent permanent impacts.

12. Minor and temporary impacts to aquatic species within the Project area within LaPrele Creek are anticipated under the Proposed Action. The geomorphology, hydrology, and water quality of LaPrele Creek would be in flux until the Proposed Action was executed but would return to the previously established conditions created by the original Dam. It is unlikely that the Project would result in permanent impacts to aquatic species within the area.
13. Minor and temporary impacts to terrestrial species within the Project area are anticipated under the Proposed Action. Temporary impacts to terrestrial species would likely be caused by the presence of construction workers and equipment as well as temporary elevations in noise levels within the vicinity of construction activities. Areas of suitable habitat for some species may also be disturbed by the use of staging areas or access roads. It is unlikely that the Project would result in permanent impacts to terrestrial species within the area.
14. The Proposed Action would have no effect on ESA listed species Piping Plover, Whooping Crane, Pallid Sturgeon, Ute Ladies'-tresses, and Western Prairie Fringed Orchid. The Proposed Action is also not likely to jeopardize the ESA proposed species Monarch Butterfly and Suckley's Bumble Bee.
15. Impacts to cultural resources within the study areas or adjacent lands could occur under the Proposed Action, including damage to existing historic properties and potential impact to previously unknown artifacts during construction of access roads or the dam. A qualified archaeologist will supervise the installation of the fences to ensure no cultural materials are disturbed. If there is an inadvertent discovery of cultural materials, construction around the discovery will be halted and Reclamation will be contacted. Reclamation will follow procedures set forth in 36 CFR 800.13 Post-review discoveries.
16. The inadvertent discovery of human remains on private and state lands is covered under Wyoming State Law WS-7-4-106. If human remains are discovered during construction, work will be halted within 100 feet of the discovery. Reclamation will be notified and notify appropriate parties under state statute and will follow procedures set forth in 36 CFR 800.13 Post-review discoveries.
17. Approximately 9.1 acres of prime farmland are anticipated to be impacted by the Proposed Action. Temporary impacts due to location access and staging areas would be revegetated and reclaimed following construction. Some permanent impacts may be required for access roads. It is estimated that no acres of farmland would be lost under the Proposed Action.
18. The proposed reconstruction of the Dam, in addition to mitigating the long-term economic impact is anticipated to produce limited short-term economic benefits. Those benefits are anticipated to be attributed to construction of the dam in the years 2026-2028 rather than mitigating the affected agricultural production output.

Approved:

Lyle D. Myler
Area Manager, Wyoming Area Office