



Marble Bluff Dam and Fishway

Overview

Marble Bluff Dam is located on the lower Truckee River, approximately three miles upstream of Pyramid Lake near the town of Nixon, Nevada, on the Pyramid Lake Paiute Reservation. Constructed in 1975 by the Bureau of Reclamation as part of the Washoe Project, the dam plays a vital role in water management and native species recovery in the Truckee River Basin.

- ✓ Location: near Nixon, NV
- ✓ Impounds: Truckee River
- ✓ Creates: n/a
- ✓ Total Capacity: n/a
- ✓ Part of: Washoe Project
- ✓ Built: 1973-1975
- ✓ Type: Concrete
- ✓ Size: 23-ft high; 1,131-ft long

Operations

Marble Bluff Dam is a low-head diversion structure, not a storage dam. Its primary purposes are to divert sediment away from Pyramid Lake, facilitate fish passage with an adjacent fishway, and regulate streamflow in the lower Truckee River.

The unique fishway is designed to support Lahontan cutthroat trout and Cui-ui, both native to Pyramid Lake and listed under the Endangered Species Act. Historically, water diversions and river alterations prevented these fish from migrating between Pyramid Lake and their natural spawning areas. The fishway overcomes this barrier through an innovative mechanical system. Fish are guided into holding pools downstream of the dam, then lifted by a specially designed elevator and released upstream where they can continue their journey to spawn. The system is operated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with technical support from Reclamation, and includes facilities for biological monitoring to track fish health and migration patterns.

In addition to supporting fish passage, Marble Bluff Dam plays a role in maintaining water quality and ecological health. By controlling sediment loads and regulating seasonal streamflows, the dam helps preserve Pyramid Lake's clarity and supports the recovery of native aquatic habitats. These efforts are essential not only for environmental stewardship but also for the cultural heritage of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe, for whom these fish species hold spiritual and subsistence value.

Marble Bluff Dam and Fishway are maintained through a coordinated partnership involving Reclamation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe, Nevada Department of Wildlife, and other stakeholders participating in the Truckee River Operating Agreement. Together, these partners work to balance ecosystem needs, tribal priorities, and water resource management in this unique desert lake and river system.



Marble Bluff Fishway provides a passage for endangered cui-ui and threatened Lahontan cutthroat trout to migrate from Pyramid Lake into the Truckee River for spawning.