

Contact: Rich Jackson, 208-678-0461, ext. 38

Ririe Dam and Reservoir Proposed Interim Winter Operations

The U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation is asking for public comment to help identify issues and concerns associated with Proposed Interim Operations of Ririe Dam and Reservoir, Bonneville County, Idaho.

Reclamation proposes to reduce Ririe Reservoir winter drawdown for a 10-year interim period to improve refill reliability and increase water availability for irrigation without increasing downstream flood risk.



The Ririe Dam and Reservoir was constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and transferred to Reclamation for operation and maintenance through a memorandum of agreement in 1976. Reclamation manages the Project for multiple purposes including water storage for irrigation; the USACE is responsible for the flood control operations of the Project as required by Section 7 of the Flood Control Act of 1944. Proposed actions at the Project must be developed with consideration of impacts to flood risk.

Reclamation conducted an initial scoping meeting in Idaho Falls, Idaho, to identify issues and concerns associated with the proposed interim operations. The EA was postponed while Reclamation considered initial scoping comments and worked with the USACE, Water District 1, and Mitigation Inc. to complete a Ririe Reservoir Winter Release Test Plan (Plan). The purpose of the Plan was to test/study the capacity of Willow Creek and the Ririe outlet channel to evacuate flood control space during winter conditions without an increase in flood risk. The test was conducted in February 2013. Based on the information gained from the test, Reclamation has revised the alternatives to be evaluated in the EA and is conducting a public scoping.

Reclamation has determined that an Environmental Assessment (EA) is required under the National Environmental Policy Act in order to undertake this action. The EA will evaluate the impacts of the proposed action on both human and natural environments. This analysis, together with input from the public, will assist Reclamation in making an informed decision on the proposed interim operations.

Currently, there are five winter storage alternatives being considered.

- **Alternative 1 (current operations)** – Requires 50,000 acre-feet of flood control space from November 1 through March 1. The current operation drafts Ririe down to 55,000 acre-feet of flood control space in early November and allows the reservoir to fill into the 50,000 acre-feet of flood control space requirement to avoid winter discharges from the dam.
- **Alternative 2** – Proposes the same water operations as detailed in Alternative 1 except the reservoir is drafted to 50,000 acre-feet of flood control space by November 1. There are no discharges from Ririe Dam from November 1 through March 1 unless the reservoir is forecast to reach storage levels which encroach into the exclusive flood control flood control space.
- **Alternative 3** – Proposes similar water operations as detailed in Alternative 2 except the reservoir is drafted to 40,000 acre-feet of flood control space by November 1.
- **Alternative 4** – Proposes the same water operations as detailed in Alternative 2 except the reservoir is drafted to 38,000 acre-feet of flood control space by November 1.
- **Alternative 5** – Proposes the same water operations as detailed in Alternative 2 except the reservoir is drafted to 25,000 acre-feet of flood control space by November 1.

Historic operations have frequently encroached upon the required 50,000 acre-feet of flood control space and have occasionally required winter releases to restore flood control space when snow accumulation on the watershed is abundant. Although the 5,000 acre-feet of additional draft in November does not avoid winter releases entirely, it usually delays the need for releases until severely cold winter conditions have passed. Alternatives 3 through 5 have increasing likelihoods and quantities of mid-winter adjustment.

It is anticipated that the Draft EA will be distributed for public review and comment in the late spring of 2014.

Please send your written comments by January 17, 2014, to: Mr. Rich Jackson, Natural Resource Specialist, Bureau of Reclamation, Upper Snake Field Office, 470 22nd Street, Heyburn, ID 83336 or via email at ririea@usbr.gov.

Ririe Dam, completed in 1977, is on the Willow Creek drainage about 15 miles northeast of Idaho Falls. The dam is operated as one of six Reclamation storage facilities on the Snake and Henrys Fork Rivers. The multi-purpose project provides irrigation, flood control, recreation, and fish and wildlife benefits. For more information about the project, please go to:

www.usbr.gov/pn/programs/ea/idaho/ririe/index.html