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Ririe Dam and Reservoir Proposed Interim Winter Operations

The U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation has prepared a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) assessing the effects of 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 draft EA was released on September 5, 2014, for a 30-day public comment period, ending October 6. Ririe Dam and Reservoir are located on Willow Creek about 15 miles northeast of Idaho Falls, Idaho.



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

The draft EA analyzes proposed alternatives for 10-year interim operations intended to improve the refill reliability and availability of irrigation water from Ririe Reservoir and Dam with no change in flood risk. This would be accomplished by decreasing Ririe Reservoir winter drawdown in the fall, resulting in more water held in the reservoir between November 1 and March 1.

Reclamation conducted a scoping meeting in January 2011 in Idaho Falls, Idaho, to identify issues and concerns associated with the proposed interim operations. The EA was postponed while Reclamation considered scoping comments and worked with the Corps, 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 floodway 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, new alternatives were developed and presented for public comment in a second public scoping in December 2013.

Currently, there are two winter storage alternatives being considered.

- **No Action Alternative-Initial Winter Flood Control Space of 55,000 Acre-feet** – The No Action alternative proposes to maintain the current water operations at Ririe Reservoir. The reservoir is drafted in November to 5,000 acre-feet below the fixed 50,000 acre-feet of flood control space requirement from the Water Control Manual for a total of 55,000 acre-feet of available flood control space (Figure 1). This available space includes the 10,000 acre-feet exclusive flood control space. Typically there is no discharge from Ririe Dam from November 1 through February, allowing the reservoir to store any inflows during the winter period.
- **Alternative 1** – Alternative 1 proposes to draft Ririe Reservoir by November 1 to a fixed 50,000 total acre-feet (5082.24 feet elevation) of flood control space which includes the 10,000 acre-feet of exclusive flood control space as described in the Standing Operating Procedures for Reservoir Regulation for Ririe Dam, for a 10-year interim period. The purpose of the proposed 10-year interim operational period is to gain knowledge and experience in regulation techniques that would aid in determining long-term operational procedures. This alternative would allow the inflows into Ririe Reservoir to be stored up to 8,000 acre-feet in the period from November 1 through February. During this time there would be no discharge from Ririe Dam unless the total flood control space is less than 42,000 acre-feet (initial 50,000 acre-feet of space minus 8,000 acre-feet of inflow) (Figure 1). On a yearly basis, prior to November 1, Reclamation, Corps, and Mitigation, Inc. would make a determination whether to implement this alternative for the upcoming storage season.

Ririe Reservoir Total Storage Capacity = 100,484 acre feet

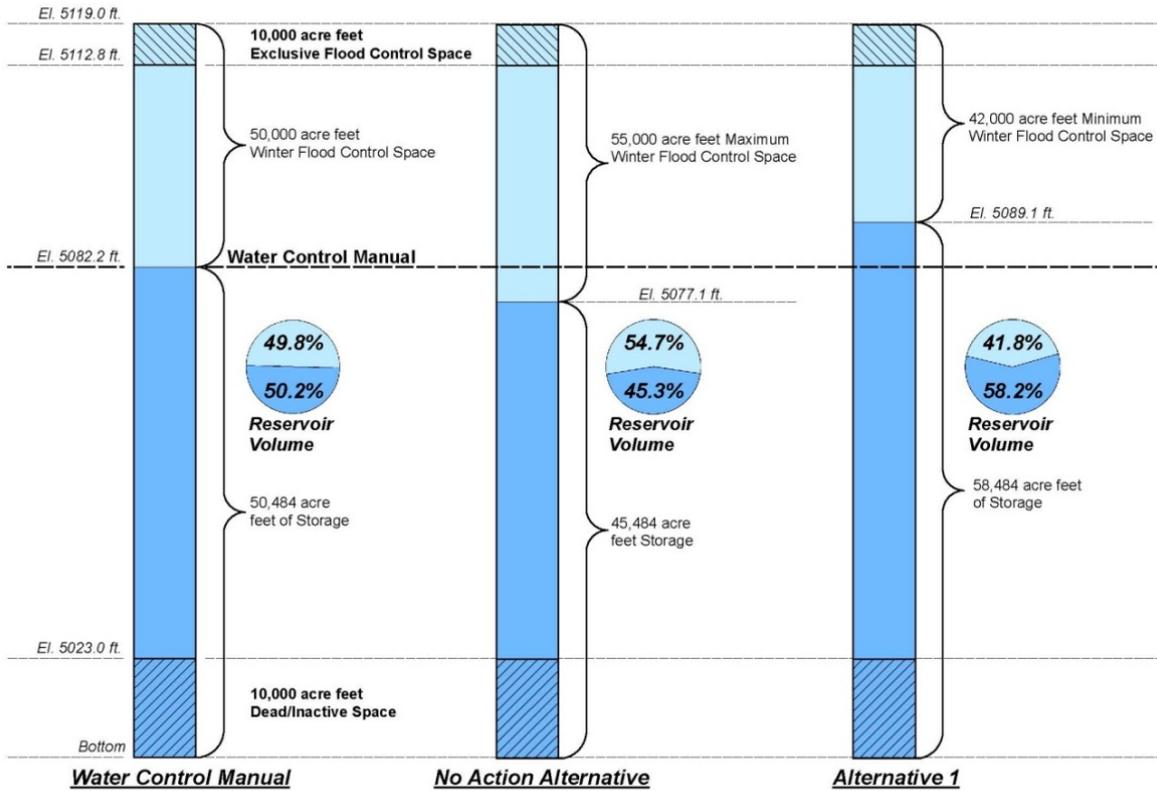


Figure1. Flood control and storage space allocation comparisons between the Water Control Manual, the No Action alternative, and Alternative 1.

Reclamation determined an EA is required under the National Environmental Policy Act in order to undertake this action. The draft EA evaluates the impacts of the proposed alternatives on the human population and the natural environment. Public input on the draft EA will assist Reclamation in making an informed decision.

Please send your written comments by October 6, 2014 to: Mr. Rich Jackson, Natural Resource Specialist, Bureau of Reclamation, Snake River Area Office, 230 Collins Road, Boise, Idaho 83702 or via email at ririeea@usbr.gov.

Ririe Dam, completed in 1977, is on Willow Creek 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