

For information, contact:
David Eskelsen 801-220-2447
Media Hotline 800-775-7950

Ashton Dam reconstruction project resumes Aug. 8

ASHTON, Idaho, Tuesday, July 27, 2011—With successful completion of the first phase, the project to improve the Ashton Dam to modern construction standards will resume Aug. 8 with connection of a new bypass tunnel. The tunnel will allow the Henry's Fork River to pass around the dam while the work on the dam proceeds this fall and is completed by the end of 2012.

Construction of the tunnel-to-reservoir connection will require additional bedrock drilling and blasting from about mid-August to mid-September. Residents near the dam and reservoir may notice the sound of drilling and will likely hear loud reports from the blasting as the remaining bedrock material between the tunnel and the reservoir is removed. As this work proceeds, the reservoir must be lowered to about 17 feet below its current level.

As the reservoir surface drops in September and is held at the lowered level through November, recreational boating on the remaining small reservoir will not be allowed because of concerns for public safety. Due to the significantly smaller reservoir size, swifter water currents and unknown shoreline conditions may present unique hazards to anyone boating on the reservoir.

As before in 2010, warning signs will be posted in advance to designate areas that must be avoided during the blasting and excavation work. Residents near the dam area are being contacted directly to inform them of the company's plans. Warning horns will be sounded before detonating each blast, and surface blasting will take place only during daylight hours. These activities will likely be heard by those living close to the project. Others in the surrounding area may hear this work, as well.

PacifiCorp, which operates as Rocky Mountain Power in Idaho, has worked for several years with federal and state officials and interested stakeholders on the planning and preparations for this project. Project planning was closely coordinated with environmental, federal, state regulatory and permitting agencies who have authority over hydroelectric projects. Extensive consultation and planning for safety and water quality considerations have been a priority in this process.

PacifiCorp has again selected W.W. Clyde & Co., headquartered in Springville, Utah, as its contractor for this next phase of its three-year project to improve Ashton dam.

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“We recognize that this construction has an impact on both residents and recreationalists as we continue on with this large and important project,” said Robert Atwood, project manager for PacifiCorp. “The company is committed to long term ownership and operation of the Ashton hydroelectric project for our customers because it produces clean, low-cost electricity. Our first concern is always for the safety of the general public and of the employees and contractors working on or near the project.

“Accordingly, we respectfully request that people not attempt to view the construction up close,” Atwood said. “Because of the emphasis on safety, public viewing of the construction cannot be allowed at this time. PacifiCorp employees or representatives are required to escort any persons away from areas near the project site to safe locations.”

PacifiCorp has been working with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the Idaho Department of Water Resources Dam Safety since 2004 to evaluate the condition of the dam and to determine the scope of work required to upgrade the structure to modern standards. The utility consulted with qualified structural engineers and engineering geologists, all with extensive experience with the design and construction of embankment dams like Ashton.

The need to pursue a more detailed evaluation of the dam’s condition was identified in spring 2004 and that evaluation was conducted periodically over several years, requiring adjustments of the reservoir level from time to time. Throughout the evaluation phase, company officials met periodically with those who use Ashton Reservoir for irrigation and for recreation to keep them informed of the project and the schedule of work as it developed.

About Ashton Hydro Plant

The Ashton Hydro Plant is operated by PacifiCorp Energy, which provides electric generation services to Rocky Mountain Power and Pacific Power. The project is located on the Henry’s Fork of the Snake River, approximately 2.5 miles west of the city of Ashton, Idaho. The project began operating in 1914 and was later purchased and expanded in 1925 by Utah Power & Light Co. (a predecessor company of Rocky Mountain Power). The project consists of a dam and powerhouse with three generating units. The dam is a rock and earth filled structure, 60 feet tall and 226 feet long, with a 70-foot-wide concrete intake and 82-foot-long spillway. A roller compacted concrete cap was installed in 1991 to protect the embankment during flood flows. Unit No.1 is rated at 2.85 megawatts. Units No.2 and No. 3 are rated at 2.5 megawatts.

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