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Ashton dam project moves into second phase

ASHTON, Idaho, Wednesday, May 4, 2011—With the completion of the new bypass tunnel, the Ashton dam reconstruction project is moving to the second phase of the project. Work will proceed now on three specific events: the connection between the reservoir and the bypass tunnel; construction of a cofferdam upstream of the existing dam; and reconstruction and improvement of the dam itself.

PacifiCorp, which operates as Rocky Mountain Power in Idaho, has worked for several years with federal and state officials and interested stakeholders on this 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.

Connection of the bypass tunnel to the reservoir will be done by removing a rock barrier left in place during tunnel construction. This will allow the reservoir to be lowered sufficiently to divert the Henry's Fork River around the dam, powerhouse and spillway structures while improvements to the dam and related structures are completed. Because of harsh winter conditions this past season, company engineers, consulting with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, postponed connecting the reservoir to the new bypass tunnel until late summer 2011.

Construction of the cofferdam will also start late this summer. The water elevation will remain close to its current elevation until then. Reconstruction of the dam is scheduled from June through November of 2012.

“We recognize this project has affected all users of the reservoir and the river,” said Robert Atwood, project manager, PacifiCorp Energy. “We are encouraged and appreciative of the cooperation we’ve received from agencies, irrigators, recreationalists, fishermen, adjacent property owners and interested parties as we have reached this first milestone in the remediation project. We are pleased with W.W. Clyde & Co.’s diligent work and keen awareness of safety matters as they have constructed the by-pass tunnel over this past year.

“As before, we request that people not attempt to view the construction up close.” Atwood emphasized. “Because of the emphasis on public safety, the immediate area around the construction site is restricted to contractor and company personnel only.”

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Throughout the entire process, PacifiCorp worked with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the Idaho Department of Water Resources Dam Safety to evaluate the structural conditions of the dam and to determine the most appropriate design and construction method to upgrade the structure to modern standards. The company consulted with qualified independent experts with extensive geotechnical and structural engineering experience regarding the evaluation, design and construction of embankment dams like Ashton.

In addition, all work associated with the evaluation of the dam, the design of the improvements and the progress of construction has been reviewed and approved by a board of three independent experts in the field of geotechnical engineering and geology.

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 Ashton Plant is located on the Henry's Fork of the Snake River, approximately 2.5 miles west 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 each rated at 2.5 megawatts.

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