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BLM Addressing Little Hyatt Dam Risks

Medford, OR – The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will begin to stabilize the right abutment of Little Hyatt Dam to greatly reduce the chances of a catastrophic failure. In a report requested by BLM, OTAK, an independent engineering firm, described the potential of erosion wearing away the support under the right abutment, leading to a loss of foundation and the “...sudden failure of the entire dam.”

As part of BLM’s effort to reduce the hazards associated with the current condition of Little Hyatt Dam, BLM commissioned OTAK to evaluate the reparability of the dam. In addition, OTAK strongly concurred with BLM’s proposal to stabilize the right abutment as an interim short term action.. “Getting independent confirmation that stabilizing the right abutment would substantially reduce catastrophic failure was key,” said Ashland Resource Area Manager John Gerritsma.

The stabilization actions will include pouring concrete into a void on the right side where, according to the report, the abutment “now relies on the support of the concrete canal wall to prevent it from overturning.” The work will be initiated as soon as possible. The cost of the temporary right abutment stabilization is estimated to be between \$20,000 and \$40,000. “The report validated the emergency lake draw down efforts we undertook when we saw increased leaks and erosion in early September,” said Gerritsma.

The report also identified multiple weak spots and “soft concrete” across both sides of the dam, including a 15 inch hole on the upstream face. Measurements on the downstream face showed consistent increases in the depth of the eroded areas when compared to the 1999 findings, including an increase of seven inches in one spot. OTAK engineers speculate that the continued deterioration on both sides of the dam will lead to holes that will connect, grow larger, and allow water to pass directly through the dam. This could lead to the dam’s failure and draining of the lake, but it is unlikely to result in a catastrophic collapse. No time frame for such an occurrence can be predicted, though the report said it could be within a few days of refilling the lake or years.

The report also confirmed the dam is still repairable and estimates the 2008 costs to repair the dam will be \$721,000. The cost estimate does not include construction of a coffer dam, delivery of water downstream, or associated costs with design and contracting services which will increase the cost of repairing the dam to over one million dollars. The report also noted that “...less extensive repair methods such as patching the eroded areas would likely have a limited effect on the lifespan of the dam.”

“The right abutment fix is not the final decision, but it greatly decreases the short-term risk as we get closer to winter weather and it allows us a little time to further explore community-



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driven solutions,” said Gerritsma. Discussions with officials at the Federal, state, and local level, as well as community groups interested in the fate of Little Hyatt Lake will continue in the hopes of finding an agreeable long-term solution and identifying necessary funding.

The OTAK Geotechnical and Structural Evaluation reports will be posted tomorrow at <http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/medford/newsroom/index.php>

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About BLM

The BLM manages more land – 258 million surface acres – than any other Federal agency. Most of this public land is located in 12 Western States, including Alaska. The Bureau, with a budget of about \$1.8 billion, also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM’s multiple-use mission is to sustain the health and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Bureau accomplishes this by managing such activities as outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, mineral development, and energy production, and by conserving natural, historical, and cultural resources on the public lands.

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