

General Fact Sheet for the Nelson Dikes Safety of Dams Modification Project Milk River Project, Montana

The following provides various questions and responses to each question regarding the Nelson Dikes Safety of Dams Modification Project:

Question: Where are Nelson Dikes located?

Answer: Nelson Dikes, which forms Nelson Reservoir, is located about 19 miles northeast of Malta, Montana. The Dikes consist of five earthen embankment structures designated as Dikes A, B, C, D, and DA.

Question: When was Nelson Dikes constructed?

Answer: Nelson Dikes was originally constructed in 1915. The Dikes were raised about 11 feet to their present configuration in 1922 to add additional storage capacity.

Question: Who owns Nelson Dikes?

Answer: The structures forming Nelson Dikes are owned by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation). Operation and maintenance of the Dikes is performed by the Malta Irrigation District.

Question: Why are modifications required at Nelson Dikes?

Answer: As part of Reclamation's ongoing Safety of Dams Program, Reclamation has identified a need to modify Nelson Dikes to address concerns with seepage conditions at Dikes C and DA, the two largest dikes. In their present condition, risk of failure of the dikes exceeds Reclamation's dam safety and public protection guidelines. Reclamation and the Malta Irrigation District have increased the monitoring requirements for the dikes in the interim while plans to modify the dikes are developed to address these concerns. Only Dikes C and DA require modifications.

Question: When will the work start and when will it be completed?

Answer: Onsite construction is anticipated to begin in the summer of 2014 with a goal to complete the majority of the onsite work by the end of 2014.

Question: Will the level of Nelson Reservoir be impacted during the construction period?

Answer: Yes. In order to perform the construction work, Nelson Reservoir must be lowered to elevation 2205 feet by the date onsite construction starts. This is 16.6 feet below the normal maximum storage level of 2221.6 feet. The reservoir storage capacity at elevation 2205 feet is about 27,145 acre-feet, or about 35 percent of the normal maximum storage of 78,950 acre-feet at elevation 2221.6 feet. In the last 30 years of operations the reservoir has been at or lower than elevation 2205 feet 4 times (1984, 1985, 1988-1989, and 2000-2001).

Question: Will irrigation deliveries be impacted because of this project?

Answer: Possibly. Reclamation is working closely with the Malta Irrigation District as well as the Milk River Joint Board of Control to plan this project to minimize the impacts to irrigation deliveries. We currently anticipate construction activities to start on or before about August 25, 2014. The operation of Nelson Reservoir will be planned as to lower the reservoir to elevation 2205 by this date. Starting construction on or before August 25, 2014 will provide the best opportunity to begin refilling the reservoir in fall 2014, weather permitting.

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation

Question: How much will the project cost?
Answer: The total cost of the project is estimated at about \$7 million.

Question: Who pays for the cost of the work?
Answer: The project is being performed under the authority of the Reclamation Safety of Dams Act of 1978, as amended. In accordance with the Act and Reclamation Policy, 85 percent of the total costs are federally funded, and 15 percent of the total costs must be repaid by project water users receiving reimbursable benefits from the project. Reimbursable benefits for the Milk River Project include irrigation and municipal/industrial purposes. The total project costs are currently estimated to be approximately \$7 million, making the reimbursable portion of the total about \$1.05 million (15 percent of \$7 million). This total reimbursable amount is further reduced by statutory credits which are available to the Milk River Project in the amount of about \$804,000. Therefore, the total amount that is reimbursable by the water users is estimated at about \$246,000.

Question: What are “Statutory Credits”?
Answer: Statutory credits are revenues that are generated over time by the Milk River Project. This includes revenues from grazing leases, the sale of excess land and water, right-of-way or easements, oil and gas royalties, etc. These revenues can be utilized to offset the cost of Safety of Dams projects such as the Nelson Dikes project, and are applied to the reimbursable portion of the total cost of the project as a whole. The statutory credits will decrease the amount the project beneficiaries are required to repay.

Question: Who are the water users that benefit from Nelson Dikes?
Answer: The project beneficiaries of Nelson Dikes and the Milk River Project include 8 irrigation districts (Malta, Glasgow, Dodson, Fort Belknap, Alfalfa Valley, Zurich, Paradise, and Harlem Irrigation Districts); 6 municipalities (Cities of Chinook, Havre and Harlem; Hill County Water Supply District; North Havre County Water District; and Grandview Cemetery Association of Saco); and approximately 150 individual contract water pumpers along the Milk River.

Question: Will Reclamation be completing any environmental analysis on this project?
Answer: Yes. Reclamation is required to do an environmental analysis on the proposed federal project in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

Question: What kind of environmental analysis will be conducted?
Answer: Reclamation plans to prepare an environmental assessment (EA) that will be looking at all resources that may be affected by the proposed action.

Question: What kind of resources will be taken into consideration?
Answer: Resources that will be analyzed in the EA include fisheries, recreation, land and vegetation, water quality, water quantity, climate change, wildlife, and cultural resources.

Question: Will I have an opportunity to comment on the EA or the proposed action?
Answer: Yes. Reclamation anticipates providing the draft EA to the public for comment about October 28, 2013. Public comments will be received until about December 11. The EA will be available online at <http://www.usbr.gov/gp/mtao/nelson/>. Reclamation also plans to conduct several public meetings in communities in the vicinity of Nelson Dikes about mid-November 2013 to obtain public comments on the EA and the proposed project.