

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
FOREST SERVICE  
NORTHERN REGION

FEDERAL BUILDING  
MISSOULA, MONTANA

file in  
2320  
ADDRESS REPLY TO  
REGIONAL FORESTER  
AND REFER TO

2710

March 27, 1961

Mr. Merle D. Lloyd  
Route 2  
Hamilton, Montana

Dear Mr. Lloyd:

This is in further reply to your letter of February 23 to Mr. McArdle.

Inasmuch as Mr. Gerer and Mr. Sizer have written to Mr. McArdle on this matter and their letters contain essentially the same points, I am sending copies of this letter to them and also to all known members of the Blodgett Creek Irrigation District.

I appreciate your concern over the importance of the east face of the Bitterroot Mountains as a source of water for irrigation for ranches and farms located on the west side of the Bitterroot Valley. The Forest Service recognizes that production of water is one of the major uses of national forests. Your letter raises three questions: first, the impact of the reclassification of the present Selway-Bitterroot Primitive Area on irrigation storage reservoirs; second, the status of the Blodgett Creek Irrigation District's High Lake Dam; and third, the Blodgett Creek Dam proposed by the State Water Board.

The importance of the irrigation reservoirs to the economy of the Bitterroot Valley is recognized. The brochure prepared by the Forest Service on the Selway-Bitterroot proposal has the following statement:

When the primitive area was established in 1936, there were 46 irrigation reservoirs in use on the east face of the Bitterroot Mountains within the boundaries. Twenty-five are still under special use permits. However, history indicates that a number of those still in use, especially the very small ones high up in the inaccessible canyons, will be abandoned. Reservoir users are entitled to reasonable access. If a permanent road should be needed to service a reservoir, the part of the drainage affected by the road would be removed from the proposed wilderness area by boundary adjustment. Even though several drainages could be affected in this manner, the east face of the Bitterroot Range remains highly desirable as wilderness.



2 - Merle D. Lloyd - 3/27/61

This statement indicates that if necessary, adjustments will be made in the wilderness boundary to provide for access to storage reservoirs. This can be done on a case-by-case basis. It therefore does not seem desirable or necessary to eliminate the entire east face of the Bitterroot Mountains to the Idaho line to provide for reservoirs where small individual adjustments in the boundary will be sufficient to take care of reservoirs where road access is needed and it is possible or feasible to construct a road. As you know, it just would not be feasible to build roads into most of the reservoirs. The east face is the most beautiful and spectacular part of the wilderness area. We feel that it is possible to have both dams and a wilderness area in this situation.

A great deal of misunderstanding exists over the High Lake Dam. The directors of the irrigation district elected to breach the dam rather than make necessary repairs. This dam was leaking and washing dangerously at an elevation below the spillway level. The existing pipe at the headgate was not big enough to safely handle peak spring runoff. The risk of water backing above the elevation of the leak and causing a serious failure in the dam was too great. The breach dimensions are: 3 feet wide at the bottom, 12 feet wide at the top, and 8 feet deep. The bottom of the breach is about 17 feet above the base of the dam. This opening is but a small fraction of the total volume of the structure and would be a rather minor item in the work necessary to repair the High Lake Dam.

The State Water Board made a preliminary application in late 1959 for a special use permit to construct a reservoir on Blodgett Creek. At that time, the engineering design and specifications necessary to act on the application were not submitted. The State Water Board needed more time to get information on a new type of storage dam developed in Colorado for construction of reservoirs in high mountain areas. They felt this type of construction, an asphalt cement face on a dry rubble dam, offered possibilities for more economical construction. In December 1960 the completed design data and specifications were received by the Forest Service. At this time, the State Water Board was told that final action would be withheld until after the wilderness hearings in March 1961. The legal advertising and Forest Service proposal had been made public nearly three months previously. It was felt that postponing action on the special use permit until testimony of the hearings could be studied would not materially delay the project, particularly since we were informed additional funds needed for the project would be requested from the 1961 session of the State Legislature. Since the legislature has adjourned without appropriating funds for the project, it is difficult to see how the delay in action on the special use permit has any bearing in the matter.

Since possible construction of the Blodgett Creek Dam proposed by the State Water Board will be delayed until the legislature meets again, the Blodgett

3 - Merle D. Lloyd - 3/27/61

Creek Irrigation District may desire to repair the High Lake Dam this year. Should the irrigation district decide to repair High Lake Dam, I would suggest that representatives of my office and Supervisor Andersen and his staff meet with your officers and your engineers and inspect the High Lake Dam to determine repairs necessary to meet safe engineering standards.

In conclusion, I wish to assure you the Forest Service is most anxious to cooperate with the water users and irrigation districts. I know that Supervisor Andersen and his staff have devoted a great deal of attention and effort to these matters. At the same time, I hope the water users will recognize that the Forest Service has a serious responsibility to safeguard and protect the interest and safety of all of the public. We have a responsibility to ensure that water storage structures on national-forest lands are constructed and maintained in accordance with sound engineering principles. This is necessary to ensure that these dams do not fail and cause damage to public and private property or endanger human lives.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to write.

Sincerely yours,

CHAS. L. TEBBE, Regional Forester

By *CHAS. L. TEBBE*