

Interim implementation of VARQ alternative flood control plan begins in 2003 at Libby Dam

SEATTLE - The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Northwestern Division office today announced its decision to implement the VARQ alternative flood control plan operation on an interim basis in 2003 at Libby Dam on the Kootenai River in Montana.

The operation is intended to improve the ability to provide spring and summer flows to benefit threatened and endangered Kootenai River white sturgeon, Columbia basin bull trout, and salmon and steelhead in the Columbia. Basically, VARQ would result in reduced releases from Libby and Hungry Horse dams in Montana during the winter drawdown period of January through April in most years (depending on forecasted water supply), providing better assurance of reservoir refill in the summer. This is accomplished by reducing flood control storage requirements in some water runoff forecast conditions.

The decision on interim implementation of VARQ FC reflects full consideration of many factors, including Endangered Species Act compliance, potential environmental and economic effects, Tribal trust responsibilities, the Columbia River Treaty, and agency and public comments. The environmental and economic effects of interim implementation of VARQ were addressed in an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared by the Seattle District Corps of Engineers. A Finding of No Significant Impact was signed for this action on Dec. 31, 2002.

Today's decision to implement VARQ flood control at Libby Dam will take effect immediately and will remain in place until completion of an environmental impact statement (EIS) on potential longer-term implementation of VARQ flood control at both Libby and Hungry Horse dams. Hungry Horse Dam, which is operated by the Bureau of Reclamation, began interim implementation of VARQ flood control in 2002. The Corps is working with the Bureau of Reclamation to complete the EIS by late 2004. VARQ implementation at Libby and Hungry Horse dams is an action required to meet the Corps' and Reclamation's responsibilities under the Endangered Species Act as described in the Biological Opinions of December 2000 concerning operation of Federal Columbia River Power System dams, from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service.

The Environmental Assessment and the Finding of No Significant Impact for interim implementation of VARQ is posted on the Corps' [project website](#).

Questions may be directed to the Corps of Engineers' Seattle District Public Affairs Office at (206) 764-3750.