

Libby Dam provides protection to Bonners Ferry; water would have been 13 feet above flood stage

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Libby Dam provided protection to Bonners Ferry this week; the water would have been 13 feet above flood stage without the dam to help manage flood risk

Seattle, WA -- Flows in the Kootenai River at Bonners Ferry, Idaho, were high during the past week; however, Libby Dam in western Montana was successful in controlling the Kootenai River to a level approximately 15 feet lower than would have been experienced without the dam.

Though Libby Dam can never prevent all flooding in the Kootenai Valley, during the past 35 years since Libby Dam went in to operation, catastrophic floods that periodically flooded the City of Bonners Ferry and the Kootenai Flats area have been eliminated.

"Prior to Libby project, approximately 1 year out of 4 on average, the Kootenai River would achieve flood levels that put large parts of the city under water and sometimes breached levees in the Kootenai Flats area. The entire community would organize and take all measures possible to minimize flood damage," noted Larry Merkle, a Corps hydrologist at the Seattle District.

"Corps' records show that in 1961, nine local, State, and Federal agencies furnished people and equipment in the effort to control flooding and over 2,000 persons were recruited to place sandbags and participate in the flood fight effort," said Merkle, who was the chief of the Seattle District Water Management. Currently retired, he has returned to augment water management and the emergency management staff and has been an invaluable resource, especially with the flooding the region has experienced in the past couple of years.

"Last week, without Libby Dam the river level at Bonners Ferry would have been near elevation 1,777 feet, approximately 13 feet higher than present flood stage, elevation 1,764. River level at elevation 1,777 would have produced conditions similar to some of the catastrophic floods that occurred in 1950, 1954, 1957, 1961 and 1967. However, this flood would have been about 4 feet lower than the catastrophic flood of record that was experience in 1948 when virtually the entire Kootenai Flats area was under water.

The Corps operates Libby Dam for flood risk management and for other purposes in the Columbia Basin and the Kootenai Valley, including hydropower generation, recreation, navigation, and fish and wildlife.

For more on the Corps, visit the Seattle District Web site at [www.nws.usace.army.mil](http://www.nws.usace.army.mil)

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