

Corps of Engineers documents decision to adopt VARQ operation of Libby Dam  
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PORTLAND, OR - Col. Steven Miles, Acting Commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Northwestern Division, signed a Record of Decision today documenting the basis for his decision to adopt an operation at Libby Dam of variable flow flood control with fish flows up to powerhouse capacity plus spill of up to 10,000 cubic feet per second. Variable flow, or VARQ (Q refers to flow), flood control has been in effect on an interim basis since 2003 at Libby Dam.

This plan is the preferred alternative for the operation of Libby Dam described in the Upper Columbia Alternative Flood Control and Fish Operations Final Environmental Impact Statement (UCEIS) released in April 2006. In reaching a decision to adopt the selected plan, the Corps considered comments received after the publication of the final UCEIS, as well as the lessons learned from the Corps' after action review of the 2006 spill and flood event. With the completion of the record of decision, the Corps has completed compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act for the selected plan implementation at Libby Dam.

The Record of Decision is available electronically at:

<http://www.nws.usace.army.mil> by clicking on the "Record of Decision for Libby Dam" hot link under "links of interest."

VARQ is consistent with congressionally authorized project uses, existing treaties, and statutory and regulatory requirements. The selected plan is also consistent with the Corps' Tribal treaty and trust responsibilities to the affected Native American Tribes and with the Corps' responsibilities under the Northwest Power Act. Finally, the selected plan is an environmentally preferred alternative and is in the public interest.

The selected plan maintains the current level of flood control benefits in the Kootenai and Columbia River basins while affording the greatest potential operational flexibility to provide a range of flows from Libby to achieve specific habitat attributes expected to benefit the endangered Kootenai River white sturgeon. It also provides flow augmentation for threatened and endangered salmon and steelhead in the Columbia River, and avoids adverse modification of critical habitat for these species.

The Corps will implement the selected plan in adherence with the VARQ Flood Control procedures and plans to continue operating Libby Dam, to the extent

practicable, to avoid voluntarily exceeding the flood stage elevation of 1,704 feet at Bonners Ferry, Idaho, or the channel capacity at Libby and Troy, Montana.

The Corps recognizes that spill releases in excess of about 2,000 cfs to benefit listed sturgeon can result in total dissolved gas levels exceeding the maximum Montana state water quality standard. The selected plan includes coordination with the State of Montana and other regional interests to ensure releases for sturgeon above powerhouse capacity are biologically meaningful and consistent with applicable laws and regulations.

The Corps operates and maintains Libby Dam for multiple uses that are consistent with project authorizations and applicable laws and regulations. The Corps' primary consideration is minimizing risk to human life, health and safety while meeting Libby Dam's multiple purposes and responsibilities.