

## Nearly full reservoir threatens Lovell

By Carole Cloudwalker

For more than a week the near-full Buffalo Bill Reservoir has been taking in more water than is flowing out, leaving the Bureau of Reclamation with a potential dilemma.

BuRec Wyoming Area Manager John Lawson said on Thursday releases of about 6,900 cubic feet per second (cfs) were leaving the reservoir, causing some tense moments downstream in Lovell.

There already has been moderate flooding in low-lying pasture land near Lovell, Lawson said.

But he said a total of about 8,000 cfs was coming into Buffalo Bill on Thursday, with about 5,000 cfs from the North Fork and 3,000 cfs from the South Fork.

He said the next week will tell whether the reservoir will reach its full storage capacity - an elevation of 5,393.6 is considered "full pool," and the reservoir was at 5,385.8 feet above sea level Thursday.

"Once we get close to maximum capacity, we'll have no choice but to increase outflows," Lawson added.

He said Bighorn Lake near Lovell as of last week already was in its "flood pool," an area where floodwater can be stored temporarily in emergency situations.

Buffalo Bill has no flood pool area.

Once the reservoir reaches full capacity, water must be released from the dam into the Shoshone River.

The dam itself is designed to allow water to flow over the top, but that is not desirable, and Lawson said BuRec will not allow that to happen. Instead, gates built into the lower portion of the dam will release the water.

Meanwhile, a watchful John Hyde, emergency management coordinator for Big Horn County, is making daily checks of the Shoshone River near Lovell, where he said a bridge close to the gypsum plant on WYO 37, as well as some cultivated fields near the flooded pasture land, are being monitored closely.

"We feel pretty good about residences" not flooding, though, Hyde added.

He said Lawson told him Monday morning that cooler temperatures during the weekend slowed inflows into Buffalo Bill Reservoir, while the rains that fell around Cody were sufficiently scattered in time and location that they did not have a major impact.

"We have a team that keeps an eye on the situation," Hyde added.

The biggest problem, he said, is, "We don't know where it will show" if there is flooding.

"We're more concerned about what's to come than what's here," Hyde added.

He said Lawson told him the next eight days should tell the tale, but "that (time frame) just seems to keep getting moved back."

Not only are the situations at Buffalo Bill Reservoir and Bighorn Lake a concern to Hyde, but he also is watching Boysen Reservoir, which has also had increased releases at its dam.

That impacts the Big Horn River, which also feeds Bighorn Lake, Hyde said.

"We're monitoring that, but it's still below action stage," Hyde added.

He said action stage is one foot under flood stage.

"It's give and take right now," he added.

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