

Milltown Reservoir Site Update, January 29, 2008

Removal of the Milltown Dam's powerhouse began yesterday.



The north wall of the powerhouse was removed yesterday. The first section of the building's roof was removed this afternoon. The orange excavator in the photo above is separating sections of sheet metal roofing from underlying roofing. The concrete rubble at the left side of the photo is from the dam's north abutment.



The excavator in the foreground of the photo above is using an impact hammer to break up the concrete of the north abutment wall, which was constructed in 1930 to replace the original timber crib dam upstream of the concrete wall. Some of the timbers removed so far have been rotten, but a few have been in usable condition and have been salvaged. The green cables were installed in the concrete wall during repairs in the 1980's, tied into bedrock to improve dam stability. The concrete in this section of the dam was not reinforced by rebar, but included steel rails and sheet piles for stability. Envirocon has made steady progress in removing the 244 foot long north abutment wall, which is more than one third of the total length of the Milltown Dam. When this section of dam is completely removed, excavators will continue removing the concrete headwall of the powerhouse. When the powerhouse brick walls and concrete headwall are completely removed, 55% of the dam's total 668 foot length will be gone. In late March, the river will be channeled through the opening created by the removal of the north abutment and powerhouse. For the first time in one hundred years, fish will be able to swim upstream past the Milltown Dam.

The river will stay in this channel until the remainder of the dam, including the spillway, radial gate and divider block, are removed later this year or early in 2009.



The powerhouse is a three-sided, un-reinforced brick structure, with a concrete headwall that serves as an integral portion of the dam. The powerhouse and dam were built by William Andrews Clark, one of the Butte Copper Kings, who owned a lumber mill where the Bonner Truck Plaza is currently located. The dam provided power to the mill, which provided timbers and fuel for the mines and smelters in Butte, and railroad ties for the trains that hauled ore from the mines. In this photo a worker is spraying water to reduce the chance that small amounts of asbestos in the roofing will be released during its removal.



While work continues at the dam site, workers are beginning to remove the barges from the Blackfoot River that were used during the upgrade of the Interstate 90 center piers. The pier stabilization work is complete, and the barges will be removed during the next several weeks.



In the photo above, taken yesterday from the bluff overlooking the dam, an excavator is building a work pad downstream of the powerhouse that will be used during its demolition. The work pad will also keep water in the river below from flowing back into the excavation area.



All of the generating equipment has been removed from the powerhouse. One of the functional generators was removed last week from the site on a flatbed trailer, and hauled to NorthWestern Energy's headquarters in Butte. One of the generators and other historic artifacts have been salvaged and donated to the Milltown Redevelopment Working Group, which proposes an historic interpretive center be built at or near the site in the future.

Peter Nielsen
Missoula City-County Health Department
301 W. Alder
Missoula MT 59802
(406) 258-4968