

Statement of Harry C. LaBonde Jr.
Director, Wyoming Water Development Office
State of Wyoming
before the
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water, Power and Oceans
on
H.R. 2273
Amendment to the Colorado River Storage Project Act on Increasing the Active Capacity
of Fontenelle Reservoir
June 25, 2015

Chairman Fleming and members of the subcommittee, I am Harry LaBonde, Director of the Wyoming Water Development Office. I am pleased to be before you today to provide the views of my agency regarding H.R. 2273, which will amend the Colorado River Storage Project Act (CRSPA) (Public Law 84-485). The amendment authorizes the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to work with the State of Wyoming to add riprap protection to the bottom portion of the upstream face of the dam embankment. In so doing, an additional 80,000 acre-feet (AF) of existing reservoir space will be made usable.

Fontenelle dam and reservoir is located approximately 50 miles northwest of Rock Springs, WY on the Green River which is a tributary to the Colorado River. It was completed in 1964 as part of the CRSPA. This earth fill dam is 139 feet high and impounds approximately 346,000 AF of water when full. The State of Wyoming issued water right permit number 6629R for the reservoir with a priority date of January 22, 1962. Authorized water uses under this permit include irrigation, domestic, industrial, municipal, stock watering, fish and wildlife and recreation as primary purposes, and power generation is specified as a secondary purpose. Originally, the reservoir was constructed to provide water for new irrigated lands that were to be developed as part of the overall project. Due to technical reasons, the new irrigation project was never implemented beyond an experimental farm. Because the dam and reservoir were to serve irrigation water, the design of the dam did not include riprap on the bottom portion of the dam face. In essence, the dam was to act as a check dam so as to impound water at a higher elevation and deliver it via canals on both sides of the dam.

Based on best available information, it is estimated that 265,000 AF of the total 346,000 AF of reservoir space is stored against riprap protected embankment on the dam. That leaves approximately 80,000 AF of space as being stored against unprotected embankment. Riprap is a layer of large rock that is placed against soil or earth surfaces to protect the surface against the erosive action of water, i.e. waves or current. In order to use the lower 80,000 AF of space in Fontenelle Reservoir, the lower embankment surface will need to have riprap placed on it.

There are three main reasons to pursue this project. They include:

1. As the Colorado River Basin enters its 16th year of drought, the seven basin states are seeking and developing new strategies to deal with prolonged drought. These efforts include conservation, demand management, weather modification, and building new

storage projects to name a few. Upgrading the riprap protection on Fontenelle Dam is an efficient way to add more usable storage in the system.

2. The State of Wyoming is interested in enhancing its portfolio of water assets as the state continues to develop its allocation of water under the Upper Colorado Compact. These efforts include new storage opportunities in the basin. Because the Fontenelle Reservoir space currently exists, the unit cost of developing this storage space is much less than developing new reservoir space.
3. From an environmental perspective, optimizing existing storage facilities is preferred to building new storage projects.

In January 2015 Governor Matthew H. Mead released “Leading the Charge; Wyoming Water Strategy.” In this effort, the Governor describes the importance of water to Wyoming’s prosperity and future, “Water is Wyoming’s most important natural resource.” The Water Strategy delineates ten strategic initiatives for the state to pursue and three of these initiatives involve water storage projects. Strategic Initiative #4 is the Fontenelle Dam and Outworks Infrastructure Completion Project which seeks to armor the entire upstream face of the dam and upgrade, if necessary, the outlet works of the dam. The project described in H.R. 2273 is Wyoming’s Strategic Initiative #4.

In summary, H.R. 2273 seeks to create a partnership between the State of Wyoming and the Bureau of Reclamation to fully utilize the water storage assets that now exist in Fontenelle Reservoir. In this time of historic drought in the Colorado River Basin, this project is a common sense approach to make additional water resources available to a basin where water is in short supply. By utilizing water storage that was constructed in 1964, environmental impacts are minimized and cost effectiveness is maximized. For all of these reasons, Wyoming supports this bill and recommends your favorable consideration.

I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.