

Politically Speaking

By John Corlett



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A FAIRLY complete disclosure of the report the Army Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation will make on their investigations of dam sites on the middle Snake river and its tributaries will be presented at a public meeting in Orofino next Friday. The meeting was called by the Army Engineers.

The Bureau of Reclamation will be on hand with its engineers to explain technically what it found at Mountain Sheep a mile or so upstream from the mouth of the Salmon on the Snake river.

The bureau will describe what kind of a dam it can build at Mountain Sheep with a tunnel diverting water from the Salmon river and what can be expected without the diversion.

It will be recalled that the investigation was authorized by the last Congress under an amendment offered by Sen. Henry C. Dworshak. The engineers were given \$140,000 to conduct the investigation for a possible alternate to Hells Canyon dam.

Initially, the job was to have been done entirely by the Engineers, but the bureau, which has investigation funds of its own, entered into an agreement with the Army whereby it was given the task to investigate the Snake from the mouth of the Salmon river upstream on the Snake to Hells Canyon.

This left the Army Engineers with investigation of the Clearwater river drainage and a look at the Salmon river if necessary.

The basic results of those investigations will first be made public at Orofino.

This reporter ventures the bureau will find Mountain Sheep with an eight-mile diversion tunnel from the Salmon feasible and practical.

In making up its 308 report on the Columbia river basin, the engineers in 1948 came forth with a host of possible dam sites on the Clearwater river. But in that report it stressed three dams—Kookkia, Bruce Eddy and Elkberry—which would develop about 490,000 kilowatts of prime power and store 5,000,000 acre feet of water.

Kookkia has been virtually abandoned because of local opposition. The big dam there would flood about 4000 acres of farm land. Bruce Eddy and Elkberry are on the north fork of the Clearwater.

Earlier this year, the names of two other dam sites made the news, Penny Cliffs and Forks. Penny Cliffs on the middle fork

of the Clearwater was considered the best site.

Under the congressional order, the engineers were asked to come up with the most economical dams which would give a maximum of storage and power.

Since the Clearwater is yet without a dam, and the Army Engineers favor storage as far upstream as possible, it can be expected they will come up with at least one dam on the North Fork and one on the Middle Fork.

If the engineers propose two dams, they should be able to get at least 4,000,000 acre feet of storage and about 500,000 kilowatts of power.

The 308 report listed the 1948 cost of Kookkia, Bruce Eddy and Elkberry at about \$450,000,000.

Since there are innumerable combinations of dams on any watershed, it would be possible for two dams of 4,000,000 acre feet capacity to be built for \$300,000,000 or less on the Clearwater.

The engineers probably will have a number of alternates. They always have provided for them in the past.

The Mountain Sheep reservoir will hold about 2 1/4 million acre feet of usable storage. It is understood that diversion of water from the Salmon river will provide more stable storage at Mountain Sheep, develop more power and provide more effective control of water for navigation and power uses downstream. Without the diversion, the problem would be finding all of the storage which the reservoir could hold.

Engineers' Survey Lists Clearwater Possibilities

THIS columnist ventures that those attending the Orofino meeting will learn that the dams proposed by the Army Engineers will provide more storage and more power at less cost than the high Hells Canyon dam.

Not only that, but they would provide flood control and navigation benefits non-existent at Hells Canyon.

While the four lower Snake river dams at Ice Harbor, Lower Granite, Little Goose and Lower Monumental are all authorized, the true fact is that only sufficient water is available now to make Ice Harbor feasible. The downstream power benefits from the Clearwater dams would be far greater than from the high Hells Canyon dam.

The Clearwater dams would provide sufficient storage to make all four dams feasible.

What many persons fail to realize is that the Snake river above the mouth of the Salmon, drains a semi-arid country. The Clearwater drains an area whose runoff is about eight times that of the Snake river basin above Hells Canyon. In other words the rainfall and precipitation is about that many times heavier than on the Snake river basin above Hells Canyon.

The plain fact is that the total runoff from the 9600 square miles of the Clearwater drainage is close to that of the runoff from the 71,000 square miles of Idaho land of the Snake river basin above Weiser.

While the Clearwater is running wild, the Snake at the present time has more than 7,000,000 acre feet of storage, with more abuilding at Palisades and Lucky Peak.

While the water of the Snake river above Hells Canyon has been put to multiple use for irrigation, flood control and power, the water of the Clearwater is not even used for flood control and navigation and very little for power.

The Army Engineers have survey work on 19 dam sites on the Clearwater river. Not all of them can be built, of course. Many of them serve only as alternates to other sites.

It would appear that the people of north central Idaho have in their backyard the answer to all their problems. They have the water to operate dams for power, flood control and navigation.

They will find out almost to a certainty that the water of the Clearwater can develop a huge block of power and provide the wherewithal to take away some objections previously met to bring about construction of the four lower Snake river dams.

Snake Rated Nation's Best Controlled River

THIS column has mentioned before that the Army Engineers in a series of reports dating back 30 years have surveyed enough dam sites to provide more storage than there was runoff in the Snake river.

It is ridiculous, of course, to think that any agency would propose such development. The Engineers would not make such a proposal, but they survey sites so that alternate developments can take place if for some reason the original proposals cannot be brought about.

For example, on the north fork of the Clearwater river, a site at White Pine is considered an alternate to Elkberry.

But the fact remains that sufficient proposals for storage reservoirs on the Snake and its tributaries above Hells Canyon have been made to preclude efficient operation of a high dam there.

These upstream reservoirs would provide flood control, power and irrigation, and in the winter time return flow would be

available for downstream operations.

The Army Engineers have mapped out an additional 6,000,000 acre feet of storage on the Snake above Weiser, but not all of it could be put into operation.

Feasible projects, however, include Garden Valley on the middle fork of the Payette, smaller dams on the Big Wood, Little Wood, Bruneau, Weiser, Owyhee, the main Payette, and the Snake itself.

It is possible to construct a dam across the Payette near Montour to store 1,200,000 acre feet of water. This water could be diverted to the Boise river cheaper than the diversion planned by the Bureau of Reclamation from the Garden Valley reservoir site. The Garden Valley site would store 1,200,000 acre feet, and the Montour site could store the same amount or more.

In 1952, the Owyhee river went on a rampage and a dam at Duncan Ferry would add up to a million acre feet of storage capacity.

In its 308 report, the engineers suggested the Givens Springs site near Marsing as a possible storage and power reservoir. Return flow from the irrigated areas upstream could be stored in this reservoir to supply water for irrigation in the Mountain Home and Bruneau areas. Surplus waters could be released during the winter months.

In addition there are many storage sites at the very headwaters of the Snake, with most of them storing for irrigation and flood control. Power would be developed at the larger ones.

The Snake river above Hells Canyon already stands out as

probably the best controlled river in the nation and the full control is not yet in sight.

All of the reservoir possibilities listed above are entirely feasible and relatively cheap.