

The Engineers Begin Their Search For Facts

A survey party from the Bureau of Reclamation will begin this week a study of the Mountain Sheep dam site on the Snake River just above the mouth of the Salmon River.

It isn't worded quite that way in the press reports. The Bureau announced that it would "survey possible damsites along a 60-mile stretch of the Snake River." It is probably fair to assume, however, that the party has the Mountain Sheep site in mind because (1) That is the only site above the Salmon River suitable for a big dam if the Hells Canyon site is presented to the Idaho Power Co., and (2) the Mountain Sheep site has long been endorsed by Gov. Len B. Jordan and Sen. Henry Dworshak and recently by Secretary of Interior Douglas McKay.

We, therefore, reluctantly predict that the Bureau of Reclamation will discover:

(1) That the Mountain Sheep site is the best damsite between the mouth of the Salmon River and the Hells Canyon site.

(2) That the Mountain Sheep site, brushed off pretty casually in the past by the Army Corps of Engineers, should be developed by the Bureau of Reclamation.

(3) That the Mountain Sheep project should be pushed on a priority basis to help relieve the Northwest's power shortage.

(4) That the site may even be preferable,

all things considered and upon careful second thought, to the proposed Hells Canyon site.

These predictions, based upon the political probabilities, could be upset by engineering facts to be unearthed in the rather extensive (and expensive) study.

It should be remembered also that the Bureau's engineering reports will not necessarily point the way for actual construction of dams. Construction has yet to start on such projects as Hells Canyon and Ice Harbor, for example, which have been studied and restudied, checked and rechecked — and finally blocked by politics.

Mountain Sheep, however, is a Republican dam and, therefore, should be more "feasible" at present than Hells Canyon, which is, as everyone knows, a Democratic dam.

Meanwhile, the Corps of Engineers, which also has endorsed Hells Canyon in the past, is busy with engineering studies along the Clearwater River, a stream which offers a wide variety of good Republican sites.

Ordinary laymen, unversed in the mysteries of the slide rule and compass, will wait with eager anticipation to see how these forthcoming engineering reports compare with previous reports by the same agencies upon the same rivers and thus determine how the flow of the rivers has changed since the election. — B. J.