

Corps and BPA defer winter power operation decision on Lake Pend Oreille Joint News Release

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SEATTLE — The Seattle District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Bonneville Power Administration announced today they will defer the decision of winter power operations for Idaho's Lake Pend Oreille, pending further review and public coordination.

"This does not preclude future operations to produce power benefits," said Stuart Cook, chief of the Corps' Operations Division in Seattle. The Corps operates Albeni Falls Dam, which regulates the level of Lake Pend Oreille. "But we do recognize public concern about the proposed operation and we want to fully consider those concerns before making a decision."

BPA requested the option of varying the winter lake level within an up-to-five-foot range to help generate power at Albeni Falls Dam and downstream at Grand Coulee Dam. Local residents questioned whether lake level changes could pose risks to fish and wildlife and infrastructure such as docks.

"We appreciate the questions the community raised and we want to work with residents and the Corps to examine them in more detail," said Steve Oliver, BPA's vice president for generation asset management. "We're hopeful the dam can be operated in a way that considers the local importance of the lake and, at the same time, provides valuable renewable power locally and regionally."

The agencies plan to build on the local dialogue about winter operations that began in recent months, Cook said. They will hold public meetings in late spring or early summer and work with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, the Kalispel Tribe and others to further assess potential impacts before determining next year's winter operations.

Albeni Falls Dam is multiple-purpose, providing flood risk management, power generation, navigation, recreation, and fish and wildlife conservation. "We have a responsibility to manage the operation of Albeni Falls Dam, within our trust and treaty responsibilities to Native American Tribes, consistent with the project's multiple purposes, the law and our authorities," said Cook.

Lake Pend Oreille's winter elevation is managed with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, Idaho Department of Fish and Game and other stakeholder groups in part to support reproduction of the lake's kokanee population. Kokanee, which are small, lake-resident sockeye salmon, are not native, but their population has been in decline, and they serve as a food source for Lake Pend Oreille's threatened native bull trout.

BPA's proposed winter operation would provide more flexibility to meet increased power demand during cold weather events or power plant outages. Additionally, the flexibility could allow Lake Pend Oreille to capture short-term runoff that could be released later to generate power and may provide additional flow for protected fish.

Public awareness of lake level changes is important as safety is the Corps' number one priority. Despite deferring the implementation this year on the proposed power operation, a flood control operating range still exists for Lake Pend Oreille, and residents and users of the lake should take this operating range into consideration, for their safety and to protect their property.

Information about the lake levels for Lake Pend Oreille is on-line at: www.nws.usace.army.mil. Select Albeni Falls in the Corps' topics box on the upper right hand side of the page.

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