Dam Engineer Worried About LaPrele Dam

The LaPrele Dam in Converse County had seen more than double its intended 50-year service life when inspectors took a closer look at its hard-to-reach upper half in 2019, according to the Cowboy State Daily.

The intent of the inspection was to look for rock fall damage. But instead, they found cracks in the dam’s “flying buttress” structure. And that alarmed them enough to call for lowering the dam’s authorized maximum capacity to 60%. That should be enough to keep things safe, for now, but the aging structure should be replaced sooner rather than later, Nathan Graves told Cowboy State Daily on Friday. Graves was the dam safety engineer for the Wyoming State Engineer’s Office from 2012-2022. But at 114 years old, LaPrele is the nation’s oldest open-front dam.

Chances of the LaPrele Dam giving way anytime soon are slim. “The idea is, if you can keep the water off of that (the cracked section), it will be a lot safer,” Graves said. But if it did happen, it would be ugly, he said. “If that dam were to fail, it’s not going to be like an earthen dam failing, where it would slowly give way. It would happen rapidly.” Read more.

Wyoming Rate Hike Inspires Slew of Bills

Lawmakers have advanced six draft bills intended to ensure Wyoming electricity customers pay only what’s necessary for utilities to provide reliable energy without lining executives’ pockets or footing the bill for other states’ demands for renewable energy, the Energy News Network reports.

The legislative efforts attempt to fill perceived regulatory gaps in a rapidly changing utility landscape, according to Corporations, Elections and Political Subdivision committee members who debated the bills Friday in Cheyenne. Though some measures were criticized as redundant of existing utility practices and Wyoming
Public Service Commission authority, and for adding to the under-staffed commission’s workload, they’re also intended to send a message.

“A big part of what we’re doing is perception,” Rep. Jeremy Haroldson (R-Wheatland) said. “We’re having this conversation and [residents] want to know without a shadow of a doubt that when they pay their utility bill next month they’re not paying for another state’s decisions.”

All six bills will be sponsored by the committee. Bills sponsored by legislative panels are historically more likely to succeed than measures backed by individual lawmakers.

Despite the two-thirds vote threshold required to introduce non-budget bills in February’s budget session, committee members are hopeful the high-profile issue of soaring electric rates will win consideration for the slate of utility measures before the legislature. Read more.

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