

# Emergency repairs planned for Tin Cup Dam

By SHERRY DEVLIN  
of the Missoulian

The Tin Cup Dam will undergo emergency repairs this fall, lest it fail when high water hits next spring, the Bitterroot National Forest announced Tuesday.

The dam is located 14 miles southwest of Darby in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness.

Owned by the Tin Cup Water and Sewer District, the dam has been beset by problems since 1998, when a leak was discovered during spring runoff. That time, the Bitterroot forest undertook the needed repairs, lowering the spillway and constructing a notch in the dam.

That created a partial breach of the dam and reduced the storage capacity of Tin Cup Lake – thereby reducing the stress placed on the aging structure.

This July, representatives of the water district found evidence of water overtopping the notched portion of the dam and notified the U.S. Forest Service. Should the dam be overtopped again, the structure could fail.

Thus the emergency repairs planned beginning sometime between Sept. 10 and 15. This time, the notch will be partially

filled to prevent overtopping, and rocks and an impermeable liner will be placed over the notch to prevent erosion.

The spillway also may be modified, according to the water district's work plan. None of the repairs will change the reservoir's storage capacity.

Because the repairs must be completed quickly, before the onset of winter, the water district wants to use helicopters to haul supplies to the dam – and wants to use motorized equipment at the site. Normally, motorized equipment is not allowed in a wilderness area.

Forest Service officials are looking at the options available. It would be possible to drive motorized equipment to the dam on the existing Tin Cup Trail.

In a recent letter to the Forest Service, the water district's board of directors said: "We hope that our efforts will result in a stabilization of the dam structure, adequate dam safety, and will provide assurances to the public that responsible actions are under way to both preserve the badly needed water supply and the natural resources of the national forest."

In a written statement released Tuesday, water district general manager Tex

Marsolek said "failure to complete repairs this fall would compromise the dam's ability to safely store water next spring."

The Forest Service regulates the safe operation of privately owned dams on national forests and has agreed that repairs are urgently needed. Once work begins, the Tin Cup area will close to the public, for safety's sake.

The Bitterroot forest is accepting public comments on the proposed work, potential effects on people or national forest resources, and how to best minimize impacts. Because of the urgency, though, people must comment immediately.

Comments should be sent to Pete Zimmerman by e-mail at [r1\\_bitterroot\\_comments@fs.fed.us](mailto:r1_bitterroot_comments@fs.fed.us), or by phone at (406) 363-7100, or by letter to the Forest Supervisor, Bitterroot National Forest, Attention Pete Zimmerman, 1801 N. First St., Hamilton, MT 59840.

Information on the project will be posted and updated regularly on the Bitterroot forest's Web site at [www.fs.fed.us/r1/bitterroot/planning/tincup.htm](http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/bitterroot/planning/tincup.htm).

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