

Wednesday, September 03, 2003

[Home](#) - [Local News](#) - [Bitterroot Life](#) - [Sports](#) - [Features](#) - [Classifieds](#) - [About the Valley](#)

TOP JOBS

[MORE TOP JOBS](#)

LOCAL NEWS

Emergency work planned for Tin Cup Dam

By **BUDDY SMITH** Staff Reporter

More emergency repairs are planned this month for Tin Cup Dam in the wilderness southwest of Darby, officials said.

The work proposed by the Tin Cup County Water-Sewer District, which owns the dam, is meant to avert a potential for the dam to fail next spring, according to the Bitterroot National Forest, which regulates safety of privately owned dams on its lands and agrees with the irrigators that the work is urgently needed.

Dan Ritter, acting Darby district ranger, said Tuesday the dam does not pose an immediate threat to downstream residents in the Darby area, but a threat could come next spring with an unusually high runoff that could cause water to overtop a notched portion of the dam and erode the structure.

Forest Service officials said members of the water-sewer district this summer informed the agency of an urgent need to complete repairs before winter and next spring's snowmelt.

"We need to get this work done before the snow hits, which isn't very long in that country," Ritter said.

Advertisement

The repairs will require using motorized equipment in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, Ritter said, though what's not been finalized is what kind of equipment or just how it will get to the remote dam, which is 12 miles from the nearest road.

In spring 1998, a leak was found at Tin Cup Dam. The Bitterroot Forest undertook emergency repairs to protect life and property, involving lowering the spillway and constructing a notch in the dam. The work created a partial breach in the dam and reduced the reservoir's storage capacity.

On July 9 this summer, irrigators found and reported to the Forest Service evidence of water overtopping the notched portion of the dam, officials said. Both the dam owners and the Forest Service agreed that if this happened again, it could compromise the dam's integrity and possibly cause it to fail, officials said, which, among other things, could flood homes in Darby.

"Our concern is that any kind of an unusually high runoff could cause that water to come even higher up the notch of the dam," Ritter said.

The Tin Cup Water-Sewer District proposes starting the work from Sept. 10-15. The work would partially fill in the notch to prevent overtopping. Additionally, a impermeable liner and rock protection will be placed over the notch to prevent erosion. The spillway may also be modified, but the repairs won't change the reservoir's storage capacity. The dam, about 14 miles southwest of Darby at the headwaters of Tin Cup Creek, was built in about 1906, officials said, and is an earthen and rock embankment structure.

Officials said to complete the repairs within the limited time frame - before winter sets in - dam owners are proposing to use helicopters to haul in supplies and to use motorized equipment at the site, including an excavator. Ritter said a possibility also being looked at is use of a piece of excavating equipment with hydraulic legs that can be lifted independently and can "literally walk in" to the site on an existing trail.

Such a machine was used to restore an area damaged by a landslide northwest of Florence, and is lighter on the land than other equipment, he said, since it doesn't have to ride on wheels or tracks.

Officials said access plans aren't yet finalized; different options are being studied. The Forest Service will have to put its stamp of approval on the dam owners' plans. The work cannot be done without mechanized equipment and access, Ritter said.

Quick Search Classifieds

The Forest Service sent Tin Cup irrigators a nearly \$1 million bill for emergency work done by the agency in 1998. Unlike those repairs, the work currently being planned would be conducted and paid for by the water-sewer district, Ritter said, which presented engineering plans to the Forest Service.

In a letter to forest officials, the water-sewer district's board of directors said they hope their efforts "will result in a stabilization of the dam structure, adequate dam safety, and will provide assurances to the public that responsible actions are underway to both preserve the badly needed water supply and the natural resources of the national forest."

Use of motor equipment in wilderness can be controversial. Wilderness advocates sometimes oppose motorized access exceptions granted by the Forest Service, questioning their compatibility with wilderness area management.

Forest Service officials said a closure around the dam will go into effect once work begins. Forest officials are also accepting comments on the proposal, potential effects on people or national forest resources, and how to minimize those impacts.

Officials said that because of the urgency involved, those comments are requested immediately. Contact Pete Zimmerman by e-mail at r1_bitterroot_comments@fs.fed.us, by phone at 363-7100, or by letter at Forest Supervisor, Bitterroot National Forest, Attention Pete Zimmerman, 1801 N. 1st. St., Hamilton, Mont., 59840.

On the Net

www.fs.fed.us/r1/bitterroot/planning/tincup.htm

 • [E-MAIL STORY](#)  • [PRINT STORY](#)



[click here to view the pages](#)



[Home](#) - [Local News](#) - [Bitterroot Life](#) - [Sports](#) - [Features](#) - [Classifieds](#) - [Obituaries](#) - [About the Valley](#) - [Archives](#) - [Subscriber Services](#)

Copyright Ravalli Republic. All rights reserved. This site optimized for [Mozilla](#). For Questions about the site or how it works, contact the [Webmaster](#). For questions about the Ravalli Republic or the contents of the news, contact the [Editor](#).