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## Safety of dams is post-flood priority

*Conservationist says drawing down water levels may be prudent*

**By Nancy Perkins**

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ST. GEORGE — Washington County's aging dams and reservoirs may have survived last week's devastating floods, but their long-term integrity has been called into question.

"The structures are fine, but they're full of water right now. If we get a flush of water during spring runoff, and there's nothing to help slow it down, we could have more problems downstream," said Vane Campbell, an area conservationist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Richfield.

"We are suggesting it would be good if the water is drawn down in those reservoirs," Campbell said. "That might alleviate any future problems (from spring runoff)."

While Gunlock and Baker Dam reservoirs are considered stable, Enterprise Reservoir remains an open question, said Washington County Commissioner Jim Eardley.

"We need access to the reservoir. We're very, very concerned about the east side of the main dam on the lower reservoir. There is some question about the integrity of the dam on that side," he said.

At the height of the flood, when water gushed over the dam in 3-foot-deep gulps, there was even more concern about the reservoir losing its integrity.

"That concern's gone now, but we still need to get a road in there to manage the reservoir. That's our highest priority," Eardley said.

The water level at Enterprise is being lowered as quickly as possible, he said, so that engineers can fully inspect any damage and make repairs.

"If we were to have a similar (flooding) event right now, we would be far more vulnerable," he said. "We have a lot of work to do. Everybody knows what needs to be done, and we're trying to do it as quickly as possible."

Campbell said crews are conducting survey reports on the east side of the county from Springdale, near Zion National Park, to Hurricane. Their focus, he said, is to look at damage that occurred in stream channels and banks, to road culverts and other drainage facilities, and to bridges and vegetation along waterways.

"We try to put a dollar amount on it so we can restore the structure and make sure the watershed is safe," he said. "We think we'll get some federal funds fairly soon, so we're getting ready to start fixing some of those things."

Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. took a step Wednesday toward getting those federal funds funneled to southern Utah, signing a letter requesting President George W. Bush issue a presidential disaster declaration for the state.

If approved, the declaration could pave the way for federal disaster assistance for flood-damaged areas. Preliminary estimates from the Utah Department of Public Safety say the state could be eligible for at least \$13.8 million in assistance.

That money could go toward removing debris from stream channels, correcting damaged drainage facilities, and reshaping and protecting eroded banks.

"With drought fresh on our minds, the temptation is to allow these reservoirs to fill up," Campbell said. "However, the most prudent action may be to gradually lower the water level following a flooding event, allowing opportunity for future emergency watershed protection."

All of the basins in the state have above average snow water equivalents ranging from 137 percent of normal on the Price-San Rafael drainage to 322 percent of normal on the Virgin River, added Campbell.

"By far, the greatest amount of destruction was on the west side of the county," said Eardley. "But federal funds won't even begin to cover the costs of recovery. We'll have to pick up some of it, and right now local governments are spending money that they just don't have."

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