



U.S. Congressman
Nick Rahall
WORKING FOR WEST VIRGINIANS

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TRASHING OF NEW RIVER TO BE HALTED BY RAHALL MEASURE

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- While the controversy over the massive logjam of trash and other debris that backed-up last winter behind the Bluestone Dam melted from the public eye with the coming of spring, the matter has not been forgotten by U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV). Today, a key House Committee approved a Rahall sponsored provision that would require the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to minimize the release of drift and debris from Bluestone Dam.

"One of the most pressing problems we face in southern West Virginia from the operation of an Army Corps of Engineers' project involves the massive amounts of debris that backs-up behind the Bluestone Dam," Rahall said in noting that a unit of the National Park System, the New River Gorge National River, lies below the facility. "We did not go to the trouble and expense of establishing the New River Gorge National River only to have park visitors and river users assaulted by large amounts of trash floating down the river, accumulating on the river banks and hanging from tree limbs."

Today's action on Rahall's provision took place as part of the House Committee on Public Works and Transportation's approval of the "Water Resources Development Act of 1990," a project authorization bill for the Corps of Engineers.

Under Rahall's legislation, among the types of activities the Corps would be directed to take are measures to prevent the accumulation of debris at the project by collecting and removing trash on the segment of the New River upstream of the dam and lake, as well as the removal and disposal of accumulated drift and debris at Bluestone Dam itself.

Rahall said that over the years the Corps has quietly flushed accumulated debris--usually amounting on an annual basis to between six and eight acres worth--through the dam into the New River. In 1987 comments on the National Park Service's draft River Management Plan for the New River Gorge National River, he stated:

"The pass-through of trash at Bluestone Dam into the national river is the most disgusting aspect of that project's current operation...The National Park Service should take a more aggressive stance on this issue. If the Corps continues to refuse to cooperate, the National Park Service should bring this matter to the attention of the Environmental Protection Agency as dams are point sources under the Clean Water Act. Citizens should also explore legal avenues for redress...I would also note that if the Corps requires additional appropriations to remove accumulated trash from behind the dam, it should make this request to the Congress."

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In response, the Corps maintained that there were no solutions to the problem due to technological constraints associated with removing and disposing of debris at the project.

The matter did not receive wide-spread public attention until late last year when the amount of debris backed-up behind the dam grew tremendously to about 20 acres worth in the aftermath of Hurricane Hugo. With public concern mounting, in an abrupt about-face, the Corps undertook a two-day test removal and disposal effort by installing a clamshell crane on the dam. Less than 2% of the debris was removed with the remaining passed through the dam.

After this project was completed, the Corps indicated that due to the expense incurred, it could not justify making debris removal a permanent part of the operating regime for the Bluestone Dam.

However, Rahall brought to the Corps' attention a demonstration project on a technology often referred to as the 'trashrack' being undertaken by the Nashville District at the Cheatham Lock and Dam in Tennessee. This technology involves the use of a mechanical trash rack and conveyor system that is designed to collect floating debris and transport it to the end of the dam.

According to Rahall: "It is my sense that the Corps does not plan to aggressively investigate this, or any other alternative, to mitigating the debris problem at Bluestone Dam. They have gone back to their business-as-usual mode of operations. For this reason, I think that legislation will prompt the Corps to be a little more responsive to the concerns being expressed over its practice of passing trash through the dam into the national river."

The bill will be considered by the full House of Representatives in the near future.