

Safeco Field Builders Take on Keechelus Dam

By DAVID LESTER

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A national construction company that helped build Safeco Field in Seattle has been hired to repair Keechelus Dam, near the summit of Snoqualmie Pass.

The Bureau of Reclamation on Wednesday awarded the contract to Kiewit Pacific Co. of Vancouver, Wash., for \$15.3 million.

Kiewit Pacific is a subsidiary of Peter Kiewit Sons' Inc. of Omaha, Neb., the nation's seventh-largest construction firm with 2001 revenues of \$3.5 billion, according to the firm's Internet site.

Kiewit is being asked to replace the top half of the dam after workers found voids in the earthen dam in 1998. The 128-foot-tall dam was completed in 1917. The voids were created when construction timbers left inside the dam rotted.

The voids, 42 in all, suggested a remote possibility the dam could fail, bureau officials said at the time. Total storage in the lake has been restricted by 11 percent below its capacity of 157,800 acre-feet since late 1998 to reduce pressure on the dam.

Work could begin within a month and is expected to be completed in 2004.

Jim Mumford, chief of the bureau's dam safety branch in Boise, Idaho, said the contract is slightly less than the agency's original estimate of \$16 million for construction alone.

Including some \$9 million spent during the last four years of investigation work, and a separate contract to clean up and restore the work site once construction is completed, brings the total cost to slightly less than the bureau's overall repair estimate of \$32 million.

"This bid is favorable and allows us to be more comfortable with our cost estimate," Mumford said on Friday.

At the same time, the bureau is beginning a study that will look at adding fish ladders at Keechelus and the four other major dams in the Yakima Irrigation Project.

The \$4 million study is part of a pledge the bureau made after the Yakama Nation, fishery agencies and environmental groups criticized the repair plan for not including ladders.

Fish ladders would provide access to the lake and its tributaries for migratory fish.

The Yakamas have threatened to sue the bureau over the omission of ladders.

Dennis Hudson, a bureau engineer in Boise, said state and federal fishery agencies will develop an inventory of fish habitat above the five dams by January.

"We want an assessment of the existing conditions and the most reasonable passage opportunities, and an evaluation of the benefits versus the cost," Hudson said Friday. "That would rank the sites and the decision-makers can give us direction on which sites we want to study in more detail."

In addition to Keechelus, the major dams include Kachess, Cle Elum, Bumping and Rimrock.

All five store water for the 460,000-acre Yakima project, which stretches from northwest of Ellensburg to Kennewick.

According to the construction plan, the majority of the repair work will be conducted in 2003 and should be completed by late fall. Final cleanup and restoring the land from which fill dirt will be drawn are to be finished in 2004, Mumford said.

The federal government will pay 85 percent of the repair costs and irrigators will be charged for the other 15 percent over a period of three years.

Jack Carpenter, manager of the Kittitas Reclamation District in Ellensburg, said his district will pay about \$1 million of the cost. District landowners have been paying \$5 per acre during the past two years to create a fund to pay the cost.

"That is a good bid. One of the big concerns was what the contractors would actually submit as a price. We are tickled," he said. "We'll be happier when it is all done."

Kiewit was among 11 firms that submitted bids on the Keechelus project.

Kiewit participated in a joint venture to build the \$517 million Safeco Field, home of the Seattle Mariners baseball team.