



MEMORANDUM

EUGENE WATER & ELECTRIC BOARD

Rely on us.

TO: Commissioners Simpson, Brown, Helgeson, Manning and Mital
FROM: Brad Taylor, Water Operations Manager; Jeannine Parisi, Community and Local Government Outreach Coordinator
DATE: May 22, 2013
SUBJECT: College Hill Reservoir Access Plan
OBJECTIVE: Board Action

Issue

Over the past few months, new measures have been put in place to safeguard drinking water at the College Hill Reservoir. Early indications suggest that these measures are having the intended effect of raising public awareness and reducing waste on the reservoir surface. This status report includes a staff recommendation to monitor compliance with posted restrictions, continue public education on safety risks, and consider other potential security enhancements before implementing more permanent changes.

Background

The College Hill Reservoir is a vital drinking water and fire protection storage system serving south Eugene residents. Unfortunately, the 75 year-old rooftop is prone to leaking through the multiple joints between the concrete panels. Last year's attempt to re-seal the joints with all new caulking was moderately successful, but follow-up tests show that the roof is not completely waterproof. State regulators are now requiring EWEB to test the reservoir water bi-weekly until corrective action is taken (e.g., the roof is made watertight). Management plans a comprehensive review of engineering alternatives that meet this requirement by the end of 2014, including decommissioning the facility and building new storage capacity elsewhere.

In the meantime, recognizing there is an elevated public health risk at this facility, EWEB is actively pursuing ways to minimize known threats. Animal waste is the most likely source of contamination, so interim measures have focused on keeping dogs off the reservoir roof. After preliminary conversations with several neighbors, EWEB erected gates and "No Dogs" signs at both entrances to the reservoir roof.

On April 9, EWEB hosted a neighborhood meeting to explain facility use expectations and new security measures. The concept of adding a fence to the gates and restricting public access to planned activities via a reservation system was discussed. Neighbors proposed a volunteer 'reservoir watch' system as an alternative solution, and feedback on both potential solutions was requested from attendees (see Attachment 1 for a summary).

Later in the month, staff attended the Friendly Area Neighborhood meeting and provided an update on the gates and other security enhancements under consideration. At that meeting, neighbors voted to form a reservoir watch committee to partner with EWEB staff in monitoring the reservoir for animal waste and other hazards.

Discussion

Neighbors and EWEB staff both report that since the installation of the gates, there is a dramatic reduction in dog-walking on the reservoir; EWEB has no documentation of dog waste being left on top recently. However, past experience is that continued compliance will require on-going monitoring and communication about expectations. Staff has met with neighbors to explore the 'reservoir watch' concept in more detail, including tracking of volunteer activity and documentation of any problems noted. Neighbors have proposed using a 'Google' calendar for scheduling volunteers and giving EWEB access to the calendar to review the inspection log (see Attachment 2). Given that the gates/signage seem to be working well, any partnership with neighbors will only enhance monitoring and provide quicker removal of potential hazards than weekly staff inspections. Other comments received from community members on this topic are included in Attachment 3.

In addition, management is also planning ahead for the July 4 holiday, when fireworks have caused damage to the rooftop the past few years. To reduce the likelihood of firework damage this year, the gates will be locked and posted that the reservoir is closed to public access. Exact dates are still being confirmed but the intent is to lock the gates starting the weekend before July 4 through the weekend after. As in the past, media notices will accompany signage, and extra EWEB security personnel will be assigned to patrol that facility more frequently, particularly the evening of July 4. The closure provides another opportunity for community education to raise awareness about the potential risks to drinking water at the facility and emphasize the dog prohibition.

TBL Assessment

A TBL review of a fencing option versus status quo (pre-gates) was conducted and can be finalized upon request.

Recommendation

With general Board direction, staff will continue to work with neighbors to implement the reservoir watch concept on a trial basis, as well as move forward with notifications to close the facility over the July 4 holiday. Over the next few months, management will also consider if there are additional measures that would enhance facility security (e.g. lighting and/or cameras) as well as continue to track incidences of dog waste and vandalism to see if a change in approach is necessary.

Triggers signaling a need to step up security would include declining participation in the reservoir watch program, increased evidence of dogs or other activities that elevate risks to drinking water, and collection of a confirmed positive water sample. It may be worth noting here that even if it is determined that fencing can be avoided at this time, permanent solutions that address a broader range of deficiencies associated with this aging facility may preclude public access in the future. However, with this determination at least a year out, management's recommended approach is both cost-effective and flexible to different potential alternatives.

Requested Board Action

Management requests board approval of the recommended approach.