

## Locks remain closed at 2 Snake River dams



BY ANNETTE CARY  
[acary@tricityherald.com](mailto:acary@tricityherald.com)

River traffic up the Snake River will be delayed a little longer after an extended maintenance outage was scheduled to end.

All locks on Columbia River up to the Snake had returned to service by Monday afternoon.

However, the Army Corps of Engineers has announced that some issues will keep Ice Harbor and Little Goose dam locks from reopening on the Snake River as scheduled. The extended outage was supposed to end at a minute before midnight Monday.

“This is a challenge for businesses and stakeholders, but the bottom line is safety is a priority for all who operate on the river system,” said Kristin Meira, executive director of Pacific Northwest Waterways Association.

Much of the commercial traffic on the Columbia and Snake rivers as far inland as Lewiston stopped Dec. 12 during a 14-week maintenance outage at the locks that allow boats and barges to pass through the dams. The outage allowed critical major repairs, improvements and annual routine maintenance to be done.

Monday afternoon, the navigation locks at the Snake River’s Lower Monumental Dam near Kahlotus and Lower Granite Dam near Pomeroy both returned to service, beating the schedule by several hours.

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Kristin Meira, Pacific Northwest Waterways Association

Some maintenance that could not be completed is continuing at both locks, which could make lockage times up to 20 minutes longer than usual until work is finished.

In addition, divers are still working on underwater repairs at Lower Monumental’s floating guide wall upstream of the lock. High river flows and poor visibility in the water have slowed progress, according to the Corps.

The lock at Ice Harbor Dam on the Snake River near Burbank is not expected to return to service until late Thursday night, a three-day extension to the outage, because of an unexpected mechanical issue, the Corps said.

Corps maintenance and staff engineers are investigating unusual “popping” noises that are heard when the gate hoist machinery, which was replaced during the outage, is operated.

The extra three days will be used to help determine the cause and find a remedy.

At Little Goose, which is near Starbuck, the delay in reopening the lock to river traffic will be longer.

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Jason Williams, Corps project manager at Little Goose lock

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The new schedule calls for having the lock resume operations before April 3.

The delay is caused by a combination of unanticipated cracks that must be repaired and an unusually cold and snowy winter that slowed work, the Corps said earlier this month.

A new contract was awarded to Knight Construction and Supply of Deer Park to finish the remaining work. It held the contract to replace the gate hoist machinery at Ice Harbor lock. Work has been done at the Little Goose lock by Dix Corp. of Spokane.

“A number of critical items remain in order to return the gates back into operation, but Knight Construction is working aggressively around the clock, seven days a week, to return the gate to service,” said Jason Williams, project manager for the lock work at Little Goose, during a conference call with shippers.

Last week, Knight was at the lock and had started repairing a weld on one lock gate and bolting in structural supports for a crack found on a girder, Williams said.

Tow boat companies and grain growers have products ready to move and want to start shipping as soon as possible, Meira said. But they appreciate the maintenance work done during an exceptionally harsh winter.

“It is miraculous they are not looking at much longer extensions,” she said.

*Annette Cary: 509-582-1533, @HanfordNews*



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