

Boats will be back, with outage ending for most Columbia, Snake dam locks



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You should start seeing more boats back on the Columbia and Snake rivers in about 10 days.

There has been little traffic on the rivers during an extended maintenance outage on the locks that allow boats to pass eight dams. The outage started Dec. 12 and was scheduled to be completed in time for locks to be back in service March 20.

Work is on schedule despite a difficult winter, except for at Little Goose Lock and Dam on the Snake River near Starbuck, according to the Army Corps of Engineers.

While other locks go back into service, at least another week of work by a contractor will be needed at Little Goose, the Corps said.

The delay was caused by a combination of mechanical issues, and compounded by an unusually cold and snowy winter that slowed work.

In early January, contract workers had difficulty removing a pin on the operating cylinder and jacking system placement. Then, post-welding cracks appeared on gate structural members, requiring additional welding repairs.

The lock needed major repairs to its downstream gate that are critical for safe and reliable operations, the Corps said.



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Contractor Dix Corp., of Spokane, went to a double-shift work week starting in early January and the Corps dropped some noncritical repairs from the contract, but work remains behind schedule, according to the Corps.

Commercial shippers are being kept informed and an update on the schedule is planned Tuesday.

“We understand and deeply regret the impact to our navigation stakeholders caused by this schedule change,” said Jason Williams, Corps project manager.

“The Corps has been partnering with our contractors at every level from the chief executives to on-site key personnel to identify and implement every possible method to minimize the delay.”

There will be impacts from the delay in reopening the lock at Little Goose, but shipping will resume downriver from there, said Kristin Meira, executive director of Pacific Northwest Waterways Association.

“Tidewater had planned to resume shipments up to Lewiston, where there is a significant amount of wheat,” she said.

The 465-mile commercial navigation route inland from the Pacific Ocean to Lewiston on the Snake River, is the top wheat-export gateway in the nation. It also is used to transport other agricultural products, petroleum products and steel and other metal items, with all goods moved valued at about \$3 billion annually.

“We understand the vital importance of the Columbia and Snake rivers to the economy of the Pacific Northwest and want to return all locks to service as safely and as quickly as possible,” said Lt. Col. Damon Delarosa, the Corps’ Walla Walla District commander.

The locks also will be used by recreational boaters starting March 20. The lock at Bonneville Dam on the lower Columbia River reopened earlier, as scheduled, on Feb. 9.

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