US Army Corps of Engineers
St. Paul District

# Public Notice

**Project:** Lake Ashtabula and Baldhill Dam, Water Control Manual Update

**Date:** May 5, 2025
**Expires:** June 6, 2025

**In Reply Refer to:**
Regional Planning and Environment Division North

1. **Project Proponent.** St. Paul District, Corps of Engineers, 332 Minnesota Street, Suite E1500, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101.

2. **Project Authority.** The construction and operation of Baldhill Dam was authorized under the Flood Control Act of December 22, 1944, and Public Law 81-772, September 8, 1950. Construction of the dam began in 1947, was completed in 1950, and was dedicated in 1952. The dam was originally an earth fill, spanning a 1,650-foot length and 1,285-foot height.

Baldhill Dam operations are guided by a site-specific Water Control Manual (WCM) which was last updated in 2013. The Baldhill Dam WCM is currently being reviewed and updates are proposed.

3. **Project Location.** The Lake Ashtabula and Baldhill Dam Project is in eastern North Dakota, approximately 15 miles north of Valley City in Barnes County. Lake Ashtabula is formed behind Baldhill Dam lying in a narrow river valley and is 27 miles long but less than one-half mile wide.

Baldhill Dam is located on the Sheyenne River which originates in central North Dakota, near Devils Lake, and flows approximately 500 miles southeasterly to join the Red River of the North. The Sheyenne River flows from the center of the state and curves in towards Ransom County to flow northeasterly. It enters the Red River of North about 10 miles north of Fargo, North Dakota.

4. **Summary of the Selected Plan.** The WCM provides operational parameters defining how and when water is stored and released. These include a schedule of releases, conservation pool levels to be maintained during non-flood or drought conditions, and downstream water level constraints. Lake Ashtabula is authorized for flood control and water supply. It is also authorized for the additional purposes of pollution abatement and recreation and fish and wildlife management.

The US Army Corps of Engineers has reviewed the existing WCM and is proposing to revise operating parameters to better serve the project purposes. This review resulted in the creation of a draft Decision Document with an Integrated Environmental Assessment. The selected plan does not involve any modifications to the dam structures, but rather is evaluating how to best manage water using the existing project infrastructure.

The selected plan includes the following operational parameters:

- Implement a spring flush when conditions allow.
- Increase minimum flows, when possible, from 13 to 23 cfs.
- Reduce winter drawdown during droughts.
- Allow for a standard drawdown during periodic inspections.
- Addition of a drought operation plan to the WCM.

5. **Coordination.** Coordination with outside agencies and groups has been ongoing throughout the WCM review, and plan selection process. The following agencies and groups have participated during the review process: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, Environment and Climate – Canada, North Dakota Game and Fish, North Dakota Department of Water Resources, North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality, Garrison Diversion Conservancy District, City of Fargo, City of Grand Forks, and the Red River Joint Water Resource District.

Agency scoping and update meetings were held on 10 October 2023, 10 May 2024, and 9 October 2024, respectively.

A draft Decision Document with Integrated Environmental Assessment and appendices were prepared and coordinated in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

6. **Summary of Environmental Impacts.** The proposed changes to operations would positively impact the health of the water system and benefit those who rely on it. Specifically, incorporating a spring flush when feasible would better replicate natural river flows, creating a more suitable environment for native aquatic life. Increasing minimum flow rates, where possible, would enhance water availability for users downstream. During dry periods, reducing the extent of winter drawdowns would improve water supply for both upstream and downstream communities. Maintaining a standard drawdown schedule for routine inspections would allow District staff to safely and effectively assess the structure. Finally, developing a clear drought operation plan within the Water Control Manual will strengthen coordination between the USACE and other agencies, and allow for a more efficient response when drought conditions arise.

The Endangered Species Act provides for the conservation of threatened and endangered plants and animals and the habitats in which they are found. Five species listed as threatened, endangered, or proposed for listing by the USFWS may be found in the area: northern long-eared bat, Dakota skipper, monarch butterfly, western regal fritillary and western prairie fringed orchid. The St. Paul District has determined that the Selected Plan would have no effect on these species.

7. **Report**. The draft Decision Document and subsequent appendices that describes the project in detail are available to the public and can be viewed at: https://www.mvp.usace.army.mil/Home/Public-Notices/.

8. **Review and Comment.** Any comments on the draft Decision Document should be provided before the expiration date of this notice. Persons submitting comments are advised that all comments received will be available for public review, to include the possibility of posting on a public website. Questions on the project or the feasibility report should be directed to Lake.Ashtabula@usace.army.mil. Please address all correspondence on this project, to District Commander, St. Paul District, Corps of Engineers, ATTN: Regional Planning and Environment Division North, 332 Minnesota Street, Suite E1500, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101.

Jonathan Sobiech

Digitally signed by Jonathan Sobiech
Date: 2025.05.05 13:42:13 -05'00'

Jonathan Sobiech
Deputy Chief, Regional Planning and Environment Division North