Jefferson-Whitehall Unit - Reichle Dam

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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STATEMENT OF: Senator Mike Mansfield (D. Montana)

RE: Jefferson - Whitehall Unit--------Reichle Dam

During a visit to Butte, Montana, on September 21, 1965, I stated, "I am not in favor of the Reichle proposal," the major construction on the Jefferson-Whitehall Unit being studied by the Bureau of Reclamation. The dam and reservoir would inundate approximately 10 miles of the Big Hole River, one of the few remaining Blue Ribbon fishing streams in the country. Based on information available to me at that time, I did not think the whole project would be economically justified.

I recognize that the project being proposed by the Bureau of Reclamation has generated a great deal of discussion and controversy. Fish and wildlife enthusiasts and conservationists are very much opposed to the project. Cities and towns and other economic interests have expressed interest and support for the construction of this project. Although I still am not convinced that Reichle Dam is a reasonable plan, I have indicated in recent years that I do have an open mind and would be perfectly willing to study carefully any formal proposal that might be submitted to the Congress. All projects of this kind must be authorized and subsequently funded by the Congress. In mid-January the Department of the Interior announced its approval for review of this Bureau of Reclamation project, recommending its development in western Montana. The report on the Jefferson-Whitehall Unit is now being reviewed by the states of the Missouri River Basin and the interested
Federal agencies seeking their review and comments.

The project would irrigate 64,210 acres of land in Madison, Jefferson, Silver Bow, Broadwater, and Lewis and Clark counties. In addition to Reichle Dam, the proposed facilities of the development include the offstream Milligan Dam and Reservoir, 2 diversion dams, the Jefferson and Townsend Canals, and other canals and distribution facilities. The existing Crow Creek Pump Unit would be incorporated into the Jefferson-Whitehall development. The proposed project also provides flood control, recreation, and fish and wildlife benefits.

The project is considered to be feasible from an engineering standpoint and economically sound with a benefit cost ratio of 1.5:1. The Bureau of Sports Fisheries and Wildlife has not endorsed the project because of damages to the Big Hole River.

The future of the project will ultimately depend on Congressional authorization. There are several steps to be taken before the project can be submitted to the Congress. Authorization and funding may be sometime away because of the current backlog of projects already authorized and competing demands, in addition to current budgetary considerations.

While I am still somewhat concerned about the Reichle Dam proposal itself, I wish to restate that I have an open mind on the entire unit. When it is reported to the Congress, I will study it over carefully, keeping in mind the feasibility report and the needs of this part of western Montana.
P.S. Senator Metcalf has maintained somewhat of an uncommitted position, and Congressman Olsen has introduced legislation to authorize the Reichle Dam.