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Department of Water Resources Issues Updated Dam Safety Standards

BISMARCK, ND – The North Dakota Department of Water Resources (DWR) has issued its final version of the Dam Safety Standards. The standards will become effective January 1, 2024 for all new dam construction permits and modifications.

The standards outline the administrative and technical requirements necessary to obtain a construction permit that complies with DWR’s dam safety focus. All dams, ponds, lagoons and other similar water retention structures must meet the minimum requirements identified in the standards to obtain a construction permit from DWR. The standards also provide useful information for the design of dams that do not require a construction permit from the DWR.

“These new standards are critical to advancing the state of dam design and construction practice in North Dakota,” said Aaron Carranza, Regulatory Division Director at DWR. “This update will help North Dakota’s ongoing effort to enhance critical infrastructure resilience.”

The standards update the 1985 Dam Design Handbook with state-of-the-practice requirements and processes. They incorporate and replace DWR’s 2016 Emergency Action Plan Guidelines and 2022 Probable Maximum Precipitation Guidance. Further, the standards integrate the 2023 Hazard Classification Review process from DWR’s Hazard Classification and Legacy Dam Policy. Alongside this effort, the Hazard Classification and Legacy Dam Policy has been updated to remove the previous hazard classification review process and now focuses solely on the legacy dam process.

The standards were developed in consultation with RJH Consultants and funded by FEMA’s National Dam Safety Program’s State Assistance Grants. The standards went out for a 45-day comment period in June 2023 and received over 300 comments that have informed changes to the final document.

“Enacting the new Dam Safety Standards is a significant accomplishment for both the DWR team and the state,” said Andrea Travnicek, DWR Director. “DWR remains committed to ensuring that all dams in North Dakota are classified, designed, permitted and constructed in a technically-sound manner with dam safety as a priority.”

DWR, in partnership with RJH Consultants, will be providing standards review and training workshops for both dam owners and the dam engineering community in early 2024. Scheduling information will be posted at www.dwr.nd.gov when it becomes available.

For more information on DWR’s Dam Safety Program, see www.dwr.nd.gov/reg_approp/dam_safety/ or contact Karen Goff at kgoff@nd.gov or 701-328-4953.

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