



# WATER COMMISSION OFFERING NEW ONLINE WATER EDUCATION PROGRAM & ACTIVITIES

Annual water festivals, typically held across North Dakota each spring and fall, were greatly impacted by COVID-19. Altogether, education across the country faced many challenges during the pandemic. Schools were advised to conduct full-time online instruction or implement a hybrid learning model.

Water festivals and in-person water education outreach programs were also postponed throughout the pandemic until public health concerns could be addressed. During this time, several online learning approaches were introduced and teaching migrated to various digital platforms across the nation. This helped initiate the modernization of water education programs and how they are offered.

The Water Commission used this opportunity to enhance its water education program and virtual presence in providing public outreach. Water education and professional development are possible even when students and teachers cannot meet face-to-face.

In collaboration with Project WET (Water Education Today), ND facilitators, and numerous water education partners, a virtual water education program has evolved. Easily accessible interactive lessons have been designed for educators, parents, and community members to utilize remotely on a flexible, user-friendly schedule. These online resources provide interactive activities to assist students in exploring water topics.

Each virtual activity provides step-by-step instructions that teach students the vital role water plays in our lives. Students can learn about the water cycle, watersheds, how to use water wisely, and many other engaging topics. Project WET will also provide enhanced activities and programs through the release of WET Connect. WET Connect will help to continue water education for people

Blue Beads is one of the many new virtual educational lessons that will be provided to students and educators.

of all ages by providing home water lessons that can be used for out of class assignments, distance learning, or home schooling.

Some of the traditional in-person North Dakota water festival activities including the incredible journey, high-water history, aqua bodies, blue beads, and many more are currently in development to be provided virtually and will be available in the future. Additionally, these new innovations will be easily accessible to areas in the state that have not been able to participate in North Dakota water festivals in the past. More rural locations will now have the opportunity to utilize the online lessons and platforms. These exciting advancements will help reach a broader audience and generate even more water education outreach.

For more information about North Dakota's Water Education program, visit [www.swc.nd.gov](http://www.swc.nd.gov). Under "Information and Education" – click on "Water Education Program."

# SAFETY OFFICIALS RECOMMEND USING EXTREME CAUTION NEAR LOW HEAD DAMS

Low head dams can be found in rivers and streams across the country and are common in North Dakota. Most low head dams in the state were constructed in the 1930s and are simple concrete or rock masonry structures that span the width of a river or stream, and raise the upstream water level until it reaches a height sufficient to flow over the dam. Low head dams can create dangerous conditions and have been referenced as “drowning machines” and “killers in our rivers” by the Association of State Dam Safety Officials (ASDSO).

Recreational river users may not be aware of the hazards posed by low head dams. Under the right conditions, water flowing over the dam can cause a “roller effect” on the downstream side of the dam. Strong recirculating currents can trap and drown boaters, swimmers, or other water users.

“This roller effect can create an extremely dangerous and even deadly situation,” stated Karen Goff, the Water Commission’s Dam Safety Program Manager. “Hazardous conditions are greatly dependent on the flow of the river. The level of danger on low head dams may vary, which provides the recreationalist with a false sense of security and can ultimately lead to a very unexpected and adverse situation.”

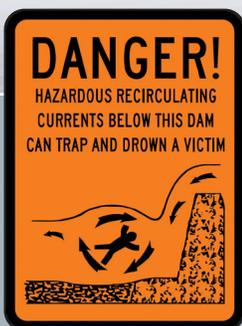
According to ASDSO, many deaths at low head dams occur when people have drowned while attempting to rescue another person. Many accidents and fatalities have also resulted from first responders attempting to rescue

victims. Regrettably, like many other states, North Dakota too has endured multiple fatalities at low head dams throughout the years.

The Water Commission has been supportive of local entities and dam owners in both the removal of structures no longer serving a purpose, and improving structures to increase safety. Most low head dams in the state are owned by Water Resource Districts or local municipalities. If dam safety concerns exist on these structures, state funding through the Water Commission’s cost-share program may be available to help support these entities with mitigation efforts.

Now and in the future, the Water Commission is committed to continue working with local dam owners and the public to help reduce potential risks, provide educational guidance regarding low head dams, and offer funding assistance to manage these structures statewide. “Please exhibit extreme caution near known low head dam sites and help educate others of the potential hazards with these structures,” urged Goff.

National Dam Safety Awareness Day is May 31 and is a day dedicated to remembering the lessons learned from past dam failures; maintaining reliable dam safety programs; promoting public safety; and recognizing the importance of vital infrastructure. For additional information on known low head dams in North Dakota and nationwide, please go to [www.swc.nd.gov](http://www.swc.nd.gov) and [www.damsafety.org](http://www.damsafety.org).



Because low head dams are known to be dangerous, the Water Commission is providing free cautionary safety signs to the owners of these dams that may be in your area. We will provide up to two signs per dam, free of charge. However, installation efforts will be a local responsibility. For more information on these free dam safety signs, please call (701) 328-2760 or email [swcmedia@nd.gov](mailto:swcmedia@nd.gov).