

Bonneville Dam Workers Assembling Turbine

By Unknown

In 1937, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) completed construction of Bonneville Dam, located forty-two miles east of Portland on the Columbia River. The dam's turbines, connected to electrical generators, create electricity when water is diverted through gates that cause the turbine to spin. During construction, the USACE employed thousands of workers, many of whom lived at a village built to house employees.

At the dam's inauguration, President Franklin D. Roosevelt said Bonneville Dam would give Americans "more wealth, better living, and greater happiness for our children" by improving navigation for commercial shipping and providing communities with inexpensive electrical power.

The dam was part of Roosevelt's New Deal's Public Works Administration, created to provide jobs for victims of the Depression. It was the first of fourteen large, federally funded dams on the Columbia River. The USACE spent \$88.4 million to build the spillway dam, a powerhouse, and navigation locks. In the 1980s, the Bonneville Power Administration built a second powerhouse.

Water held behind the dam inundated the Cascades Rapids and more than thirty-five other traditional Native fishing locations.

Further Reading: Ulrich, Roberta. "Empty Promises, Empty Nets." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 100, 1999:134-157.

Scott, Hugh A. "Reminiscence: Hugh A. Scott on Bonneville Dam and the Boom Era." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 88, 1987: 258-284.

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