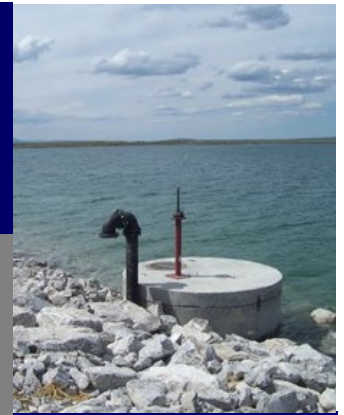


MONTANA DAM SAFETY PROGRAM BULLETIN



March 2025

In This Issue:

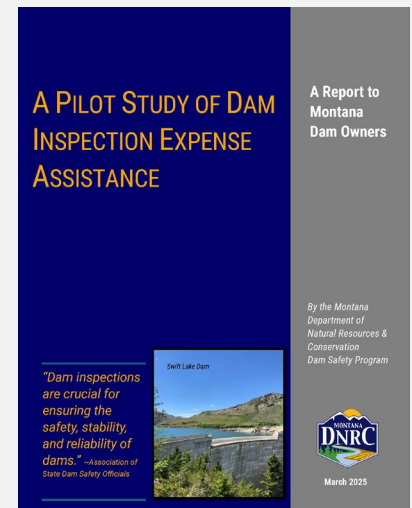
- Dam Inspection Expense Assistance
 - FEMA-Funded Pilot Study – Lessons Learned
 - 2025 Legislature – HB 256
- Dam Safety Program Staff and Program Updates

FIVE-YEAR DAM INSPECTION ASSISTANCE 2024 FEMA-FUNDED PILOT STUDY: LESSONS LEARNED

As part of a pilot study, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) shared dam inspection expenses with 11 dam owners in 2024. All of the participating dams provide a benefit to the public. The pilot study was funded with a Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) grant to DNRC from FEMA. The purpose of the pilot study was to understand how a dam inspection cost-share program could operate and to estimate annual expenses. DNRC concluded that assisting dam owners with inspection expenses fundamentally improves dam safety in Montana.

The findings are summarized in the DNRC report: “A Pilot Project for Dam Inspection Expense Assistance.” The report can be downloaded from:

https://dnrc.mt.gov/docs/water/Dam_Safety/PUBLICATIONS/Bulletins/DNRC-Report-Pilot-Study-of-Dam-Inspection-Expense-Assistance_2025-03-05.pdf



INFORMATION FOR DAM OWNERS WITH INSPECTIONS DUE IN 2025

Fortunately, the BIL grant that helped fund 2024 inspections also has funding for five-year inspections due in 2025. If your dam is due for an inspection this year, and your reservoir provides public benefits, please go to <https://dnrc.mt.gov/Water-Resources/Dam-Safety/assistance-to-states> for more information. This assistance is provided using federal funds and is therefore subject to continuing availability of those federal funds. In order to be eligible for inspection assistance funding, dam owners must select contractors who have been pre-qualified through DNRC’s procurement process. There is currently a pre-qualification in progress (see page 3), and a list of qualified contractors will be distributed on March 31.

Your regional engineer will contact you soon to discuss your inspection and this cost-sharing opportunity.

DNRC is hopeful that funding will be available for 2026 and beyond through a bill being considered by the Montana Legislature (House Bill 256, discussed on page 2).

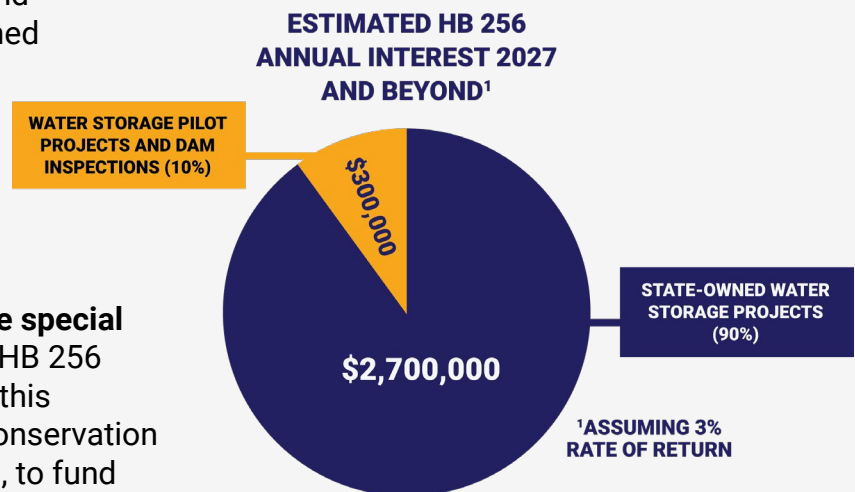
HOUSE BILL 256: \$100M WATER STORAGE FUNDING ACCOUNT

HB 256 recognizes the importance of water storage in Montana, as well as the need for safe and reliable dams. The bill proposes to appropriate \$100 million into the Montana Water Development State Special Revenue Account, an interest-generating savings account. Ninety percent of accrued interest would be eligible to fund construction, operation, rehabilitation, and modification of state-owned water storage projects. The remaining ten percent would support water storage pilot projects and help dam owners pay five-year dam inspection costs.

MONTANA WATER DEVELOPMENT REVENUE ACCOUNT – GENERAL INFORMATION

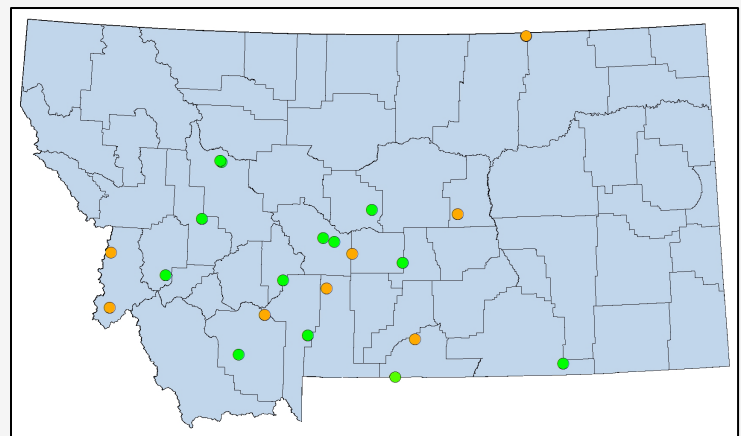
HB 256 would transfer \$100 million from the state general fund to this state special revenue account during the upcoming biennium. The interest generated from this investment would be divided between two existing accounts:

- ◆ **The water storage state special revenue account to support state-owned water storage projects** (MCA 85-1-631). Currently, a primary source of funding for this account is the state-owned Broadwater power plant on the Missouri River near Toston, Montana. Hydropower earnings alone are insufficient to fund rehabilitation of our aging state-owned dams. HB 256 would provide additional funding to the water storage account to assist long-term rehabilitation and maintenance of state-owned dams and canals.
- ◆ **The natural resources projects state special revenue account** (MCA 15-38-302). HB 256 would provide additional funding to this account, administered by DNRC's Conservation and Resource Development Division, to fund water storage pilot projects and grants for cost-share assistance on mandatory five-year dam inspections.



HOW CAN I STAY INFORMED OR PARTICIPATE?

- ◆ You can read the bill text and follow along as the bill moves through the legislative process using the Montana Legislative Services Bill Explorer: <https://bills.legmt.gov/>. Search "HB 256."
- ◆ The Montana Legislature provides information on how to participate or watch hearings: <https://www.legmt.gov/participate/>.



State-Owned Water Projects: Orange circles represent dams with major rehabilitation needs.

DAM SAFETY PROGRAM STAFF CHANGES



MICHELE LEMIEUX, PE, long-time dam safety engineer retired on Feb. 7, 2025. After 30 years with the Montana Dam Safety Program, Michele has decided to play more on weekdays, try to learn a language (again), take up an instrument, volunteer for worthy local causes, and take summer ski trips to the southern hemisphere. Michele's parting message:

"It has been my pleasure to work with Montana dam owners and engineers. Thank you for the memories, the challenges, and the victories we've shared. I am leaving you in the capable hands of Brent Zundel, the new dam safety program manager. I have confidence that the Montana dam safety community will continue to grow and innovate. I wish everyone continued success and of course, safe dams!"



DNRC is proud to welcome **BRENT ZUNDEL, PE, CFM** as the new Dam Safety Program Manager. Michele leaves Brent with a solid foundation upon which to build, as well as big ski boots to fill (especially with Brent's prairie roots in Billings!). Brent has been with the DNRC for 11 years and has degrees in civil engineering and Spanish from Montana State University. Many of you are familiar with Brent from his years as the DNRC Bozeman Regional Engineer and, most recently, as the Regional Engineering Services Section Supervisor. Brent is excited to take advantage of Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds to make a generational change in Montana dam safety, and to advance public support for future improvements. Having worked primarily in southwestern Montana, one of his priorities is to meet and work with statewide dam owners and engineers – after all, Montana is just one small town with really long streets. Brent remains based in Bozeman and can be reached at BZundel@mt.gov or 406-556-4508.

Work with Dam Safety – Request for Qualifications. The Dam Safety Program has initiated a new Qualifications Based Selection for consulting firms interested in providing engineering assistance to the Dam Safety Regulatory Program. This prequalification process applies for 2025 to 2027. The Request for Qualifications (RFQ) posted on the State's procurement website, <https://spb.mt.gov/emacs-resources>, and is open until 5 p.m. on Wednesday, March 26. For more information, please visit: https://dnrc.mt.gov/Water-Resources/WOB/Contracting_DNRC_WOB or contact Douglas Brugger, PE, CFM at Douglas.Brugger@mt.gov.

In the **May 2025 Dam Safety Program Bulletin**, look for an update on two more dam owner assistance projects:

- Operation & Maintenance (O&M) Manual Enhancement
- Emergency Action Plan (EAP) Modernization