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Army won't let Dubois drown

By PAUL BARNES
Staff Writer

The Army Corps of Engineers will not fill the New Melones Dam above the 803.5-foot level until Mark Dubois is safe, according to District Chief Engineer Col. Donald O'Shei.

Once O'Shei is certain Dubois is out of the area behind the dam, where he has chained himself to a rock, then the corps will fill the reservoir only to the 808-foot mark, still below Parrott's Ferry.

O'Shei said the corps has to fill to the 808-foot level to test the turbines on the power plant under the dam. Dubois would drown if the water rose that high.

But Gar Dubois, Mark's brother, was not satisfied with a letter O'Shei wrote to Gov. Brown Friday stating that the reservoir would not be filled above the 808 mark unless a flood situation existed below the dam.

Gar Dubois said that he would like the letter to be amended to leave out the flood condition, thereby guaranteeing that the reservoir would never pass Parrott's Ferry this year.

O'Shei said that he would not amend the letter. He agreed, however, that there is no flood danger and won't be at least until the fall.

Gar Dubois said "If this is the last letter from O'Shei then my brother will probably remain chained to the rock for a long time."

He said, however, that the letter would be sent to Mark via a messenger, apparently the only one in the Friends of the River organization who knows where Mark is.

The Army has been searching by airplane and boat for Dubois since Monday but has been unsuccessful in finding him.

Reporters, however, managed to locate him. He was in a sleeping bag when interviewed. His skin was

beginning to show signs of irritation from poison oak that laces the rocks where he sleeps.

"As the lower (Stanislaus) river has gone (underwater), a part of me has gone," Mark Dubois said. "It's been painful. I've shed a lot of tears...The Corps seems to value human life more than it values the life of this canyon. Somehow, I have never been afraid."

O'Shei said that the Army did not intend to flood beyond the 808-foot level when it became clear several weeks ago that archeological work in that area would not be finished this year.

But he said that in order to test the turbines in the power plant water has to reach 808 feet before July. That is when the Army must release water for irrigation below the dam. After July, the Army must wait a year before testing can be done.

O'Shei said the Army had planned to begin testing turbines June 1, the date that Pacific Gas & Electric Co. will energize transmission equipment there.

The testing date could still be met. O'Shei said that it would take only a few days to flood the reservoir to the 808-foot mark.

"But, I have no intention of placing Dubois in danger," O'Shei said.

Dubois' group, Friends of the River, have been protesting the filling of the New Melones reservoir because of its threat to the white water section of river above Parrott's Ferry.