

Stanislaus Crisis Eased By Corps

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The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers agreed Thursday to hold the level of New Melones Reservoir below the point where it would flood the famous "white water" stretch of the Stanislaus River.

At the reservoir, two newspaper reporters interviewed the young Sacramento man who since Monday has remained chained to a rock near the edge of the rising water and eluded a search by authorities.

District Chief Engineer Col. Donald O'Shei said he would inform Gov. Brown that the water level need not go above the level of the Parrott's Ferry bridge in order to provide electricity and irrigation water to the San Joaquin Valley.

O'Shei sent word of the engineers' plans and the state's approval to Mark Dubois, who chained himself to a rock along the river in an attempt to stop the filling of the reservoir.

"We hope Mark will accept this," O'Shei said.

At Parrott's Ferry, meanwhile, five other environmentalists, who are chained to a rock hailed Brown for his efforts but said they would remain at the water's edge until they have seen O'Shei's letter and received word from Dubois of his feelings about the Corps' reassurances.

O'Shei said his assurances do not change any of the basic plans previously announced by the federal engineers.

But the agreement was hailed by Brown's chief of staff, Gray Davis, as "a great victory for environmentalists."

The corps, as it has previously and as it does now, plans to raise the current level of the reservoir about 5 feet in order to test the turbines in the hydroelectric generators in the New Melones Dam, O'Shei said.

O'Shei said that rise will put the reservoir about 5 feet under the Parrott's Ferry bridge, which is the focal point environmentalists have been using to fight inundation of the white water stretch of the Stanislaus River.

The level of the controversial reservoir when it is turned over for operation to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, probably in late summer, remained uncertain. The governor's agreement was worked out with the Army Corps of Engineers, not the reclamation bureau, Davis noted.

Newspaper reporters who inter-

viewed Dubois on a ledge only a few feet above the cold water Wednesday night said he was then determined to remain at his possible grave site unless he obtains a commitment to stop the rising level of the new reservoir.

The Friends of the River, of which Dubois is executive director, took two reporters by river raft to Dubois after authorities, who were unable to find his hiding place, speculated the highly publicized suicide bid may be a hoax.

The key to a padlock that holds Dubois to a chain anchored in a rock on the ledge is hidden nearby, Dubois was quoted as saying. But he told the reporters he would direct no one to the key without the commitment to stop filling the reservoir.

"As this lower river has gone (under water), a part of me has gone," Dubois was quoted as saying. "It's been painful. I've shed a lot of tears."

Meanwhile, three more protesters chained themselves to a rock near the Stanislaus River's outlet into the reservoir Thursday, bringing to five the number of persons chained there in support of Dubois.

The new protesters were identified as Doris Grimm, 27, of Tuolumne City, Matthew Lawson, 19, of Angel's Camp and Laurie Pavey, 27, of Jamestown.

David Lynch, 20, of Angel's Camp, and Alexander Gaguine, 29, of Parrott's Ferry, chained themselves to a rock Wednesday in support of Dubois.

When the five at the edge of the white water were told of the federal engineers' agreement with the governor's office, they said they would stay chained to the rock until they heard from Dubois.

O'Shei, explaining his agreement with the state, said the engineers plan to raise the New Melones Reservoir level about another 5 feet to 808 feet.

That level is still 5 feet short of the Parrot's Ferry bridge, which state Department of Water Resources engineers measured Thursday at 813.3 feet above sea level. O'Shei said the dam designers plan to use that 5 feet between the normal level of the reservoir and the bridge to help control the spring runoffs from the Sierra Nevada snow melt.

His letter to the governor merely reflects those plans, which have been previously announced, O'Shei said. "The state has agreed to accept my letter indicating there is not construction necessity to inundate the Stanislaus River above Parrott's Ferry," he said.