

# Rafters Win Their Point, End New Melones Vigil

MODESTO (AP) — The river rafters who chained themselves to rocks in the New Melones Reservoir ended their vigil Monday and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers says it will resume filling.

But the Corps agrees not to raise the level above 808 feet altitude, which would bring it to the old bridge at Parrotts Ferry. Any higher than that would cover some of the best "white water" in a stretch of the Stanislaus River canyon that the protesters vow they will fight to keep in its natural state.

They say filling the dam to its design capacity of 1,088 feet would back up the reservoir to the foot of the next upstream dam, Camp Nine, covering the last nine miles of the scenic stretch.

The water was stopped at the 803.5-foot level when the Corps learned that Mark Dubois, 30, a director of Friends of the River, chained himself to a rock at a hidden place along the 60-mile shoreline on May 21.

Dubois, who friends say broke his toe getting to the place, left it during the night after seeing a letter from Gov. Brown's chief of staff, Gray Davis, saying the state would install a marker at 808 feet altitude and monitor the level.

The other six, who spent two nights in the wet on the shore of the Parrotts Ferry campground because the water rose a few inches, released themselves Monday.

One of those, Alexander Gaguine, 29, founder of the Parrotts Ferry Non-Violent Action Coalition, issued a statement urging the Corps to consider modifying the hydroelectric turbines so they could operate with a lower head of water, and to test the present turbines at the present water level instead of raising it to 808 feet as planned.

The Corps' Col. Donald O'Shei said 808 feet is the goal, plus or minus five feet. He said the five feet is "simply a margin I had tacked down initially because of the uncertainty in being able to handle sudden surges. I didn't want to give the impression that I had absolute and precise control."

The rafters say an extra five feet would cover a quarter-mile of the best white water.

O'Shei said it is also a contingency if the dam is needed for flood control. But that possibility diminishes as the Sierra snowpack runs off. Should a flood-control situation arise, O'Shei said the state would be consulted and a joint decision made.

The turbines are to be tested before the \$238 million project is turned over to the Department of the Interior, which O'Shei said plans to fill it to the 870- to 888-foot level.

Gaguine said the rafters plan a rally at Parrotts Ferry Saturday in honor of a bill introduced in Congress to place the Stanislaus River in a natural wild and scenic status.