

Rafters to renew fight for natural state Stanislaus

Associated Press

Modesto— The river rafters who chained themselves to rocks in the New Melones Reservoir say they will renew their campaign to keep a stretch of the Stanislaus River canyon in its natural state.

Mark Dubois, 30, a director of Friends of the River, limped out of his hiding place late Sunday or early yesterday after seeing a letter from Gov. Brown's chief of staff, Gray Davis. The letter said the state would install a marker at the 808-foot altitude level where the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers promised to stop the filling.

Dubois had spent a week at the spot after breaking his toe

getting to it. Six other protesters who chained themselves to rocks near the waterline at the Parrotts Ferry campground also released themselves yesterday.

The Corps said it will resume filling to the 808-foot level to test the hydroelectric turbines of the \$238 million project before turning it over to the U.S. Department of the Interior. The level had been stopped at 803.5 feet when Dubois's presence was made known.

The 808-foot level is near the old bridge at Parrotts Ferry, where the river leaves a Sierra canyon.

The Corps' Col. Donald O'Shei is stipulating 808 feet "plus or minus five feet." He said that 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."

It is also a margin for flood control. But if that situation arises, a joint decision will be made with the state, O'Shei said.

The rafters say five more feet would inundate a quarter-mile of the best "white water."

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

O'Shei said the Department of Interior plans to fill it to the 870- to 888-foot level.

One protester who unchained himself early yesterday, Alexander Gaguine, 29, founder of the Parrotts Ferry Non-Violent Action Coalition, issued a statement urging the Corps to consider modifying the turbines so they could operate with a lower head of water, and to test the present turbines at the present-water level.

4 The Tribune,
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Water rises on river protesters

Associated Press

Modesto—River rafters chained to the rocks in New Melones Reservoir said yesterday the water rose about a foot during the night, making conditions "a little wet."

Six persons chained themselves to rocks just above the water level last week to force the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to stop filling the reservoir, which the rafters say would bury the "white water" rapids that are the most fun to ride.

The Corps stopped the filling, but Col. Donald O'Shei said yesterday the water might have to go higher if a flood-control situation should arise.

Five of the rafting enthusiasts are in the Parrotts Ferry campground. A friend who visited them yesterday morning reported the higher water.

Melinda Wright of the Friends of the River, a rafters' lobby, quoted the visitor as saying the five "were sleeping in the wet because the water was seeping in a little."

The sixth, Mark Dubois, 30, a director of Friends of the River, neared a full week at his hidden location. It was not immediately known whether he too was getting wet.

Reporters who were taken to see him late last week found him in a sleeping bag, but bearing a rash from nearby poison oak and the marks of sleeping on rocks. The Corps halted its search for him along the 60-mile shoreline.

The water level is reported by the Corps as being at 803.5 feet above sea level, where it will be kept Army spokesmen say, until Dubois and the others leave.

The Corps had intended to raise the level to 808 feet to test hydroelectric turbines before turning the \$238 million project over to the Department of Interior.

The "chain gang," as they are being called locally, say they want assurances that the water will not rise above Parrotts Ferry bridge, where the Stanislaus River flows out of a Sierra canyon into rolling hills about 35 miles northeast of Modesto.

They said the level of the river under the bridge is 810.56 feet, as measured by the state Department of Water Resources. But they contend that even if the Corps promised not to go above the 808-foot level, the Corps' "plus or minus five feet" stipulation would allow it to go to 813 feet, which would cover a quarter of a mile of the best "white water" rapids.