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Indianford Dam closer to generating power

(Published Thursday, April 26, 2001 11:56:41 AM CDT)

By Catherine W. Idzerda/Gazette Staff

Generating electricity at the Indianford Dam will take more than just flipping a switch.

First, repairs to the wicket gates and power house must be completed.

Then the Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and a variety of other government agencies must approve the plan.

Finally, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission must award a permit to Tom Reiss, president of the Indianford Water Power Co..

On Wednesday, Reiss cleared one of the regulatory hoops, meeting with local, state and federal officials about his plans.

During a tour of the Indianford facility, Reiss showed officials the inside of the powerhouse and discussed some of the problems the project presented.

"One of the wicket gates has already been repaired, but we have to work on the second set," Reiss said.

The cavernous powerhouse building contains

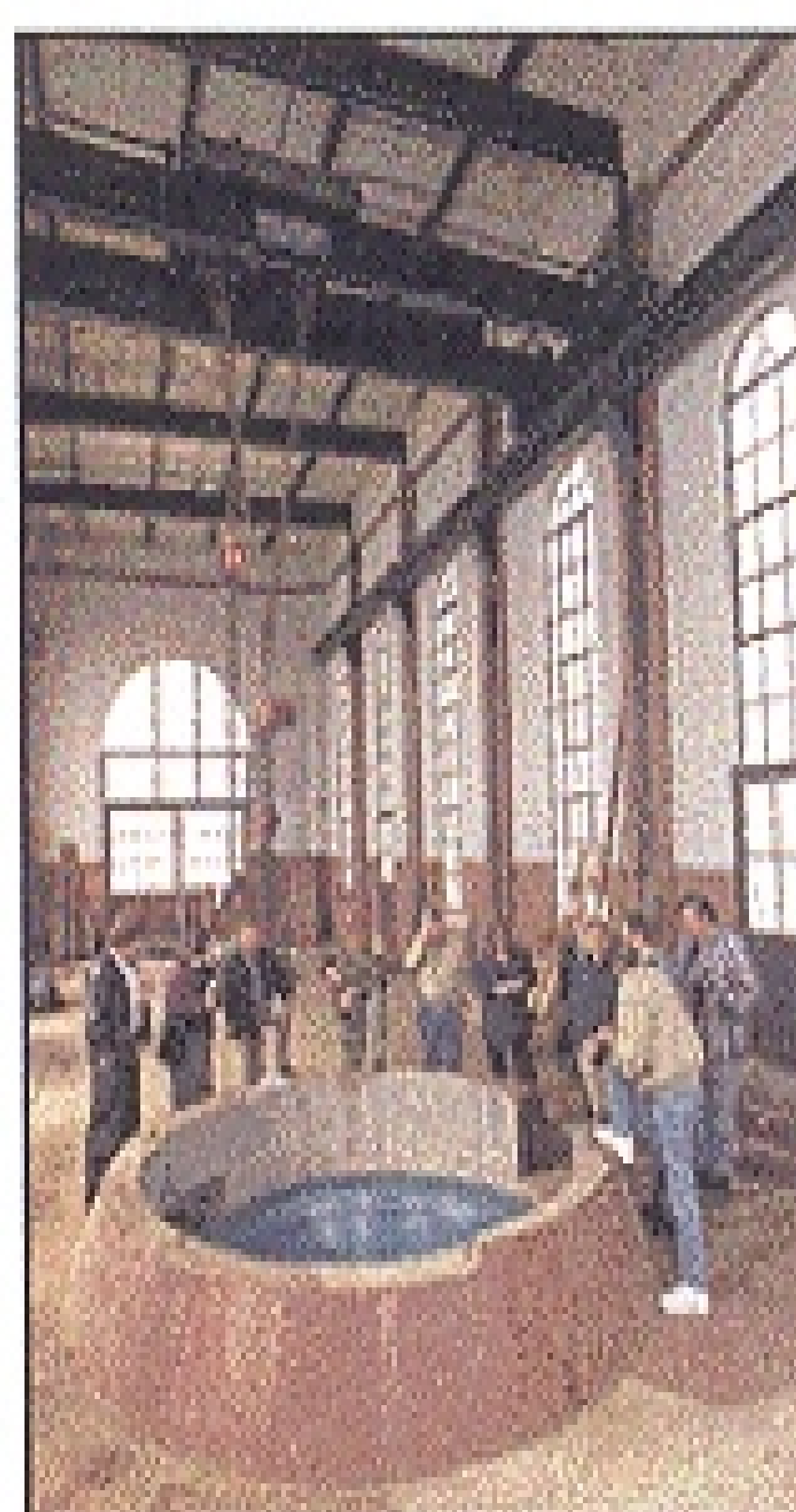
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A group of governmental officials tours the powerhouse at the Indianford Dam in Rock County on Wednesday. The Indianford Water Power Co. wants to repair the building. Bill Olmsted/Gazette Staff

little equipment.

Railings keep visitors from falling into the two large holes that used to contain the electricity-generating turbines. One hole has been sealed off, but the roar of rushing water can be heard clearly in the other.

A long, heavy chain with a hook dangled from a ceiling crane.

When the powerhouse is working, water will flow under the building, spinning the blades that are connected to turbines.

The spinning blades are yet another piece of the powerhouse that needs repair. Previous owners broke off the blades before leaving the property.

For Rock County, Reiss' plans to generate power for profit are an important part of keeping the dam in place.

Reiss has agreed to pay for a large part of the repairs in exchange for the right to generate electricity at the dam.

If Reiss cannot get the proper permits, the county could get stuck with the bill. In 1999, an engineering firm estimated that it would cost about \$504,000 to repair the dam.

The DNR will study the impact of power plant operations on fish and wildlife.

"One of the things we'll look at is the fish population above and below the dam," said Don Bush, DNR fisheries biologist.

In December 1999, the DNR concluded that a fish ladder--a passage that allows fish to swim up over the dam--would not be needed.

Other issues that might affect fish include water turbulence and the drawing force of the turbines.

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