



An American Tour: 8



Washington's Grand Coulee Dam

The Grand Coulee Dam, located on the Columbia river in central Washington, is the largest concrete structure in the United States. It forms the centerpiece of the Columbia Basin Project, a multipurpose endeavor managed by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. In addition to producing up to 6.5 million kilowatts of power, the dam irrigates over half a million acres of Columbia river basin farm land and provides abundant wildlife and recreation areas.

The idea for damming the Columbia below the Grand Coulee was first proposed by Ephrata attorney William M. Clapp in the spring of 1917. The idea gained rapid support from the citizens of Ephrata and the surrounding area. Eventually the state government took an interest in the project as well.

Ironically, because of the Second World War and the importance of the Northwest's aluminum industry to that effort, the production of electricity became the overriding priority for the dam. Irrigation was deferred until later. During the war six Grand Coulee generators were brought on line as well as two generators borrowed from the yet to be completed Shasta dam. After the war an emphasis was put back on irrigation. Construction was resumed on the pumping plant in 1946. By 1951 the plant and its six 65,000

horsepower pumps were ready for operation. The first water was delivered to the Banks Lake equalizing reservoir above the dam that same year. The first year only 66,000 acres were irrigated. Since then this figure has steadily increased as more canals, siphons, reservoirs and auxiliary pumping plants have been added to the project.

