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**STRONGER OVERSIGHT AND ENFORCEMENT OPTIONS NEEDED TO ENSURE DAM  
SAFETY, STATE AUDITOR'S OFFICE FINDS**

DENVER—A performance evaluation issued by the Colorado Office of the State Auditor (OSA) has found that stronger controls and enforcement options could further ensure safe operation of Colorado dams.

The Division of Water Resources, within the Department of Natural Resources, oversees just over 1,800 non-federally owned dams and focuses its regulatory activities on larger and higher hazard dams. High hazard dams are those that could cause loss of human life if the dams fail.

Of the 213 high hazard dams reviewed during the evaluation, 27 dams were not inspected at all during Water Year 2012 and another 12 were inspected more than 6 months after their annual inspection due dates. (A Water Year begins on November 1 and runs through October 31.) Regular inspections help ensure that dams operate safely and identify when a dam's water level should be restricted for safe operation.

Some hazard reclassification reviews are not conducted timely, the evaluation also found. Dams' hazard levels sometimes need to be reclassified due to changes in conditions, such as downstream development, based on four ratings that range from "no public hazard" to "high hazard." For the eight dam reclassifications that were completed during Water Year 2013, it took the Division a median of 20 months to complete. It took the Division more than 14 years to review Chaffee County's Droz Creek Dam, which changed from a low to significant hazard rating. Delays in reclassifying dams to a higher hazard rating could pose a risk to public safety.

Another problem related to Emergency Action Plans, which should provide a basis for the Division to help direct operations in case of a dam emergency. State regulations require dam owners to

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review these plans annually and update them if any changes occur, such as changes in the contact information for those responsible for responding to a dam emergency. However, evaluators found that the plans on file with the Division were, on average, 7.5 years old and the oldest plan on file was 31 years old. It seems unlikely that no changes have occurred related to a dam in more than 3 decades.

Although the report made recommendations to improve Colorado's dam safety program, the Division reported that the record rainfall and flooding during September 2013 did not cause any higher hazard dams to fail. According to the Division, 27 dams under its jurisdiction were damaged by the rainfall and related flooding, including 11 high and significant hazard dams and 16 low hazard dams. These dams sustained damage such as cracking, erosion, and accumulation of debris, resulting in about \$5 million of needed repairs.

The evaluation made six recommendations to improve dam safety going forward.

The OSA contracted with Harvey M. Rose Associates, LLC, to conduct the evaluation.

The full report is available electronically on the OSA's website, <http://www.state.co.us/auditor>, via the link called "OSA Audit Reports." In accordance with state statute, the Legislative Audit Committee released the audit by a majority vote during a public hearing.

Under the direction of the state auditor, the OSA is the state's nonpartisan, independent external auditor with broad authority to audit state agencies, departments, institutions of higher education, and the Judicial and Legislative Branches. The OSA's professional staff serve the people of Colorado by addressing relevant public issues through high-quality, objective audits and reviews that promote accountability and positive change in government. Performance audits address whether programs operate in compliance with laws and regulations and in a manner that accomplishes intended program goals. Financial audits include annual audits of the state's basic financial statements and federal grants on a statewide level. IT audits review procedures and technology to ensure the confidentiality, integrity and availability of the state's critical computer systems and taxpayer data. The OSA also tracks about 4,000 Colorado local governments for compliance with the Local Government Audit Law.