



# LOW HEAD DAMS

## PUBLIC SAFETY AWARENESS MONTH

April 2022

### LOW HEAD DAMS

#### "WHAT IS A LOW HEAD DAM"

A low head dam is a manufactured structure, built in a river or stream channel, extending fully across the banks. A low head dam is designed and built such that water flows continuously over the crest from bank to bank. Low-head dams are characterized by their low height, usually with a 1-foot to 15-foot drop off, which allows water to flow over the top of the dam.



## SAFETY HAZARDS

### "WHY ARE LOW HEAD DAMS SO DANGEROUS?"



Water falling over the dam creates highly aerated, circulating currents that trap people and objects underwater against the dam. These forces are nearly inescapable for even the strongest, life-jacket-clad swimmer, boats, and kayaks. These structures have earned the title of “the killer in our river” or “drowning machines.” Victims also include many would-be rescuers and first responders, several of whom have lost their lives trying to save others caught in the hydraulic current.

## KEEP YOUR DISTANCE, KEEP YOUR LIFE

### "HOW DO I STAY SAFE?"

- Study a map beforehand to locate potential dams and hazard locations or ask a local for more information about dam locations
- Always be alert for potentially dangerous situations
- Always navigate around the structure or turn around well before reaching the dam when kayaking, canoeing or boating
- Obey all posted signage and barriers in the area
- Let someone know when and where you are heading out and when to expect your return
- Never enter the water to try and help someone. Call 911 and use a remote assistive device, such as a rope or throw bag, to try and pull them to safety



# NATIONAL INVENTORY OF LOW HEAD DAMS

"HOW CAN I HELP?"



Organizations such as the Association of State Dam Safety Officials, the United States Society on Dams and the Environmental & Water Resources Institute are collaborating to locate and catalogue low head dams across the United States.

Get involved at: [www.asce.org/environmental-and-water-resources-engineering/national-inventory-of-low-head-dams/](http://www.asce.org/environmental-and-water-resources-engineering/national-inventory-of-low-head-dams/)