



US Army Corps of Engineers®

# Bluestone Dam History

*Bluestone Dam has an important place in American history.*

*A dam was first considered in the early 1800s as people began to settle on the rivers of West Virginia.*



Many years passed by, and the idea was revisited after the Civil War. In the early 1900s, a group of citizens from Hinton, West Virginia commissioned a set of specifications for a dam which provided hydroelectric power. The idea advanced, but there was disagreement on whether the dam was a state or federal project.

### Landmark Supreme Court Decision

The question eventually resulted in a landmark Supreme Court decision. Five men set out in a boat to travel the 111-mile New River to prove it was a navigable waterway. If so, the project would be considered in the federal jurisdiction. At times, the men had to walk in the water, but the river was considered navigable. The lower court ruled the river was in the federal jurisdiction, and the Supreme Court chose

not to hear the case. This important decision in 1941 set water policy across the United States.

In the meantime, the federal public works program of the 1930s was gearing up. Congress included appropriations for the dam in the Flood Control Acts 1936 and 1938. Once the Supreme Court decision was made in 1941, construction began immediately on Bluestone.

## Construction Timeline



**JANUARY 1942**  
Looking across to where the west abutment would be.



**FEBRUARY 1942**  
Dam construction headquarters, located about 500 feet below dam site.



**MARCH 1942**  
Site preparation of axis of dam.



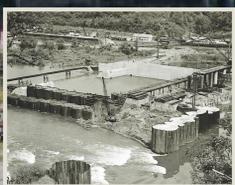
**APRIL 1942**  
Bluestone Dam construction. View from observation tower.



**AUGUST 1942**  
View from Rt. 20 on axis of dam.



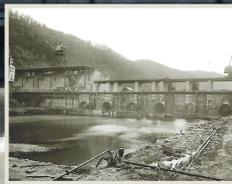
**NOVEMBER 1942**  
View from east end of dam on axis of dam.



**MAY 1946**  
View from Rt. 20 on axis of dam.



**AUGUST 1946**  
View from Rt. 20 on axis of dam.



**NOVEMBER 1946**  
Bluestone Dam construction view from downriver.



**MARCH 1948**  
View from Rt. 20 on axis of dam.



**DECEMBER 1948**  
View from Rt. 20 behind dam showing completed dam.



**DECEMBER 1948**  
View from east end showing completed dam.

### Bluestone Begins Operation in 1949

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers constructed the dam, and continues to operate and maintain it today. Construction was completed in 1948 and the dam started operating in 1949. Bluestone is a concrete gravity dam, which was the construction method at the time. It is very large, at half a mile wide and 165 feet high. Dr. Paul Philippe Cret, a well-known architect, designed the dam in the Art Deco style.

Within a few years of completion, Bluestone prevented millions of dollars of damage downstream. Today, more than 65 years later, it is safe to say the dam has prevented billions of dollars in damages by reducing the risk of

downstream flooding, allowing for economic development.

The reservoir associated with the dam is also well-known. Bluestone Lake is the 10½ mile long reservoir which is part of the dam project. It holds back water to reduce the risk of flooding. Bluestone Lake also is an important recreational area in West Virginia, providing fishing, boating and other water sports on the lake. In addition, it offers hunting, hiking, camping and other land-based sports in its adjacent Bluestone National Wildlife Refuge. The lake and refuge bring millions of dollars of economic benefit to the area each year.

### Consideration for National Register of Historic Places

In 1997, Bluestone Dam was evaluated to determine its potential eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. It is historically significant because of the landmark Supreme Court decision, its association with the federal flood control program of the early to mid-1900s, and the positive impact of the lake and wildlife area.

### Dam Modernization Program Continues Today

Today, Bluestone continues to provide many benefits. The dam has reduced the risk of flooding from Hinton to Point Pleasant, West Virginia, in a 4,600-square-mile basin. This has allowed the economic expansion of this area, and provides many associated recreational benefits. While the dam was built to state-of-the-art conditions in the 1940s, it has been recognized that the dam does not meet modern safety standards. In 2001, the Corps of Engineers started a 20-year project that includes many features to strengthen, stabilize and bring the dam up to modern safety standards. These projects continue today.

For more information, please visit [www.FloodSmart.gov](http://www.FloodSmart.gov) in addition to [www.livingnear dams.org](http://www.livingnear dams.org). You may also visit the Corps of Engineers site at [www.usace.army.mil](http://www.usace.army.mil) and contact the USACE Huntington District Office at (304) 399-5353 or [PublicAffairs@lrh01.usace.army.mil](mailto:PublicAffairs@lrh01.usace.army.mil).

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