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Media Release

Board of Directors make construction decision

KWO to build a replacement dam on Lake Grimsel

The start of June 2019 will see construction machinery fire up their engines at Lake Grimsel in the Bernese Oberland, as the Spitallamm dam – one of two dams on Lake Grimsel – is set to be rebuilt. The Board of Directors of Kraftwerke Oberhasli AG (KWO) made the decision to build the dam at today's meeting. Thanks to the involvement of construction companies from the region, a considerable amount of the added value generated by this project will remain in the Canton of Bern. KWO expects the building of a replacement structure for the Spitallamm dam to cost around 125 million Swiss francs. The construction work is expected to take six years. The Grimsel Hospiz hotel will not be opened to guests in summer 2019.

The existing step-shaped, double curvature Spitallamm dam near the Grimsel Hospiz hotel is over 90 years old and in need of renovation. The decision has now been made to replace it with a new dam wall, which will be built directly in front of the old one. At its meeting today, the Board of Directors of Kraftwerke Oberhasli AG made the decision to build the dam and approved the corresponding loan of around 125 million Swiss francs. "I was delighted with the positive decision made by the Board of Directors," commented Daniel Fischlin, CEO of KWO. "We believe that it is important that the water from Lake Grimsel can be used in the long term without placing any restrictions on the production of electricity. The construction of this new dam ensures that this will continue in future. The Spitallamm replacement dam is both an important and attractive project for KWO," continued Fischlin.

Large amount of added value to remain in the Canton of Bern

The contract for the construction of the new 113-metre-tall double curvature dam was awarded to the Grimsel joint venture consisting of Frutiger AG from Thun, Implenia Schweiz AG based in Dietlikon in the Canton of Zurich and Ghelma AG Baubetriebe from Meiringen. The three companies submitted the most financially and technologically attractive offer. With a stake of 42.5 percent in the project, Frutiger AG will have the main responsibility within the Grimsel joint venture. Implenia likewise holds a 42.5 percent stake and Ghelma the remaining 15 percent. KWO expects that up to 70 percent of the added value will remain in the Canton of Bern. This is remarkable for a major project of this kind, as a great deal of specialist knowledge and experience is required for the construction of a dam.

New structure financially and technologically the most sensible solution

The old 114-metre-tall Spitallamm dam on Lake Grimsel was built between 1925 and 1932 at the same time as the Seeuferegg dam. The Spitallamm dam has, however, exhibited irreversible deformations for a long time, which were caused by a separation in the structure of the dam wall. Building a new dam is economically and technologically the most sensible solution, and better than a partial demolition and renovation of the existing dam, as detailed investigations by KWO have shown. The current Spitallamm dam will be preserved and flooded at a later date. A tunnel next to the old dam wall will ensure that the water level is balanced hydraulically. For Kraftwerke Oberhasli, it is crucial that the water from Lake Grimsel – the beating heart of the power plant system – can continue to be used without placing any restrictions on the production of electricity throughout the construction work.

Preparation work to start at Lake Grimsel in the summer

A construction site in the mountains at around 1,900 metres above sea level is a challenging prospect for everyone involved – particularly due to the difficult weather conditions and logistics. Construction work is therefore planned to be carried out from May to October. The preparation work for the construction of the dam is set to begin at the start of June 2019. In the first stage of this work, the workers will construct the access roads and set up the construction sites. In addition, a new development tunnel will be excavated from the Seeuferegg dam under the Grimselnollen through to the new Spitallamm dam. At the end of summer 2019, work will begin on excavating the areas either side of the position in which the new dam is to be erected. A large amount of the aggregates required for the concrete will be processed locally at Gerstenegg behind the dam wall at Räterichsbodensee, where there is an old landfill for excavated material from earlier work in the Grimsel area. This is ecologically and logistically a sensible solution, as it will mean that the lorries used to transport the materials will only need to make short journeys. Nevertheless, visitors to Lake Grimsel will have to contend with additional traffic around the construction site during the summer months.

Grimsel Hospiz hotel to close temporarily in summer 2019

The roof of the Grimsel Hospiz hotel will also be renovated in summer 2019, i.e. at the same time as the preparation work for the Spitallamm dam. Due to this work and for safety reasons owing to the construction work being carried out at Grimselnollen, the hotel will be closed in the summer of 2019. The access road over the Seeuferegg dam will likewise be closed. In the winter season 2020/21, the hotel will open as usual, and both the hotel and Grimselnollen will be open to visitors once again in summer 2020. KWO will provide visitors to Lake Grimsel with a detailed tour of the spectacular mountain construction site as well as specific visitor information.

Further information on the Spitallamm replacement dam and pictorial material are available at www.grimselstrom.ch.

Further information

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