

## DWR says there was redundant power for spillway gates

By Risa Johnson, Chico Enterprise-Record  
Posted: 01/25/18, 6:00 PM PST

The state Department of Water Resources now says there were “many redundant systems” to ensure the Oroville Dam spillway radial gates had power during February’s crisis.

This comes after environmental groups voiced concern in [an article published in this newspaper Wednesday](#) about, seemingly, a lack of backup generators that would allow the department to control the gates even if crucial power lines went down. Radial gates at the top of the spillway allow for water releases.

Friends of the River, American Whitewater and others sent a letter to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission last week asking the commission to confirm whether the department had backup power for the gates, and if not, to require it be addressed. The letter references testimony by Cindy Messer, DWR’s deputy director, at a [legislative oversight hearing on the dam Jan. 10](#):

“DWR needed to protect the power lines, as Joel (Ledesma) just described to us, that were installed on the hillside that was parallel to the main spillway, the same hillside that was eroding. Without these power lines, as Joel pointed out, DWR would have temporarily lost not only its ability to operate the power plant but also the main gates at the top of the spillway, and this would have temporarily, could have been just a few days, but in the case of the power plant might have been months.”

Erin Mellon, a department spokeswoman, responded via email on Thursday to a request for comment for the original story two days prior.

“Even though we had many redundant systems to ensure we could continue operating the gates, it was important to prioritize the power lines because without them, DWR would have had to depend on backup systems for weeks or months to control the spillway gates,” Mellon wrote. “These same power lines are also the primary power source to operate releases from Hyatt Powerplant. With a broken main spillway, Hyatt became even more important as the primary way to safely manage lake levels since the emergency.”

She said there was personnel on site at all hours during the spillway emergency to evaluate and monitor main and backup power sources needed to control the gates.



Helicopters haul power poles by air as PG&E crews remove towers along the Diversion Pool to reroute transmission lines on Feb. 22, 2017 at the Oroville Dam. Dan Reidel — Enterprise-Record file photo

“The Oroville Complex has redundant power sources including backup generators to ensure operation and control of critical equipment at the facility including the spillway gates,” Mellon wrote. “Those redundant systems existed before the emergency. Additional generators were brought in during the emergency to provide a back up to the existing emergency generators.”

Contact reporter Risa Johnson at 896-7763.



*About the Author: Risa Johnson covers local politics in Butte County and the City of Oroville for the Chico Enterprise-Record and Oroville Mercury-Register newspapers. Since February 2017, she has written extensively about the Oroville Dam crisis. She is a proud alumna of Chico State University. Reach the author at [rjohnson@chicoer.com](mailto:rjohnson@chicoer.com) or follow Risa on Twitter: @risamjohnson.*

<http://www.chicoer.com/general-news/20180125/dwr-says-there-was-redundant-power-for-spillway-gates>