

# Teton Dam

## Failure timeline

*“I proceeded on the north abutment side and started to push excess rock into the cavity to keep it from eroding into the dam abutment. In the process of doing this, the dozer settled about a couple of feet and sunk out from under me.”*

— John Bellegante (Morrison-Knudsen Company employee), Oct. 21, 1976, *The Journal*



 **Oct. 3, 1975**

### Reservoir Filling Begins

- Reservoir behind Teton Dam begins to fill

**Winter 1975–1976**

### Heavy Snowpack

- Anticipation of high spring runoff due to unusually heavy snowfall

**March 1976**

### Filling Limit Waived

- Standard 1-foot-per-day rise limit is waived
- Up to 2-foot-per-day allowed to capture water for irrigation

**Spring 1976**

### Outlet Works Not Operational

- Main outlet still under construction
- Reservoir rise accelerates uncontrollably with spring runoff, exceeding 3-foot-per-day and peaking at 4.3-foot on May 18

**June 3, 1976**

### First Signs of Seepage

- Small springs seen downstream from right abutment
- Clear water seepage not considered threatening initially

**June 4, 1976**

### More Seepage Observed

- Wetness noted near right abutment
- Seepage seen halfway between the dam toe and spillway
- Clear water still visible with no major alarm

**June 5, 1976**

 **7–8 a.m.**

- Steady flow of water at the dam toe
- Muddy seeps discovered at elevations 5045 and 5200

**10 a.m.**

- Large leak develops 15 feet from the right abutment at elevation 5200
- Bulldozers attempt to fill hole
- A whirlpool appears on the reservoir side of the dam

**10:43 a.m.**

- Warning issued to sheriff's office: dam may fail

**11:20 a.m.**

- Two bulldozers lost to enlarging hole
- Operators escape, one machine never recovered

**11:30 a.m.**

- Second hole forms above the first

**11:57 a.m.**

### Teton Dam Breaches

**5 p.m.**

- Reservoir nearly emptied