

# DATA SHEET

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

### 1 NAME

HISTORIC

Eagle Nest Dam

AND/OR COMMON

### LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER Three miles southeast of Eagle  
Nest, off U.S. 64

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Eagle Nest vicinity

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

1

STATE

New Mexico

CODE

035

COUNTY

Colfax

CODE

007

### CLASSIFICATION

#### CATEGORY

DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

STRUCTURE

SITE

OBJECT

#### OWNERSHIP

PUBLIC

PRIVATE

BOTH

#### PUBLIC ACQUISITION

IN PROCESS

BEING CONSIDERED

#### STATUS

OCCUPIED

UNOCCUPIED

WORK IN PROGRESS

#### ACCESSIBLE

YES: RESTRICTED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

NO

#### PRESENT USE

AGRICULTURE

COMMERCIAL

EDUCATIONAL

ENTERTAINMENT

GOVERNMENT

INDUSTRIAL

MILITARY

MUSEUM

PARK

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

RELIGIOUS

SCIENTIFIC

TRANSPORTATION

OTHER:

### OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

J. Leslie Davis, President

STREET & NUMBER

C.S. Cattle Company

CITY, TOWN

Cimarron

VICINITY OF

STATE

New Mexico

### LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Colfax County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Raton

STATE

New Mexico

### 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

New Mexico State Register of Cultural Properties

DATE

December 9, 1978

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Historic Preservation Section, New Mexico State Planning Office

CITY, TOWN

Santa Fe

STATE

New Mexico

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED    DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Eagle Nest Dam is a masonry structure built of cyclopean concrete, arched-type, and curved on the upstream face to a radius of 155 feet. The masonry content of the structure is 26,000 cubic yards.

The length of the dam at the crest is 286 feet; the structure stands 120 feet above the lowest point in the foundation. The dam, measuring 10 feet in thickness at the crest and 52 feet at the base, has a capacity of 78,000 acre-feet.

The spillway was created through the excavation of 16,000 cubic yards of granite on the left side of the reservoir. The outlet structure includes a shaft equipped with gates, in granite rock, on the right side of the dam with one outlet tunnel and three inlet tunnels.

The dam is located on the Cimarron River in a narrow canyon. Before construction was begun, the canyon measured 40 feet at the base and 350 feet at the top. The canyon walls are formed of red granite and porphyry. Blasting for the construction project was feasible only in small charges because the river was carried over the site in a flume suspended by cables. This provided an open working space. Construction of the dam required a trestle running between the concrete batching plant below the site and 65-foot boom at the site of the dam. The boom lifted the concrete in buckets to the forms.

None of the structures used in construction remain. The area below the dam is now a private park.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1916 - 1920

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Willis Ranney (Chief Engineer)

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Eagle Nest Dam is significant because it is one of the oldest functioning arched-type dams in New Mexico in a privately financed irrigation project.

Built in 1916-20 across the Cimarron River in northern New Mexico, the dam was designed to store water for the irrigation of more than 40,000 acres of land in eastern Colfax County, most of which now belongs to the Charles Springer Cattle Company. Willis Ranney served as chief engineer on the project and Neal Hanson was construction superintendent.

A number of small irrigation projects were developed in the area in the 1880's and 1890's. Building a dam to store the waters of various streams traversing land holdings was the practice of many individual ranchers even before the turn of the century. Hundreds of small lakes resulting from these endeavors still dot the high plains from the Colorado border to Springer, New Mexico. Only the Maxwell Project and the Springer Ditch System represent large-scale nineteenth century irrigation efforts.

The largest and most important irrigation project in the area was the Eagle Nest Dam, a structure designed to harness the waters of the Cimarron River for the use of farmers and ranchers over an expansive portion of eastern Colfax County. Conceived and largely financed by one of the county's early settlers, Charles Springer, its construction marked the apex of water development in northeastern New Mexico.

The idea of storing water from the Cimarron River at the point where it departed the Moreno Valley was an old one. In 1888 a surveyor by the name of Levi Preston surmised that a one hundred ft. high dam would be sufficient to collect adequate water for the irrigation of 54,000 acres. Conscious of the need for a dependable water supply on his sprawling lands, Charles Springer purchased a six hundred acre dam site from the Maxwell Land Grant Company in 1906. In conjunction with several associates, Springer soon controlled enough land to construct a 100,000 acre-foot reservoir. Organized as the Cimarron Valley Land Company, the new enterprise announced plans to build a massive reservoir at the junction of the Moreno and Cieneguilla Rivers.



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Though various individuals exhibited interest in the project between 1908 and 1911, few were sufficiently impressed to invest in the undertaking. In 1911 a group of ranchers, including men from the Springer Ditch Company and the French Tract Corporation, joined Springer in the construction of a series of small dams and canals, but the proposed large project was postponed. Five years later Springer, impatient with the lengthy delay, announced his intention of beginning the large dam.

Prior to the initiation of dam construction, two preparatory jobs had to be completed. Owing to the St. Louis, Rocky Mountain and Pacific Railway's plans to extend into the Moreno Valley, a railroad tunnel had to be cut through the rock above the dam site. Also, the road from Ute Park to Elizabethtown and Taos had to be diverted from the bottom of the canyon in order to bypass the proposed construction site. Beginning in late 1916, 150 men worked on the eight mile project. Major construction work on the dam commenced in early 1918.

A temporary town established near the dam provided housing for several hundred laborers recruited from all over the state. Equipment and supplies were transported to the site through Cimarron, and a sixty-foot overhead trestle was installed to lift the cement into place. When the underground work was completed in 1919, the structure began to rise above water level.

Despite the feverish building activity evident at Eagle Nest between 1918 and 1920, several factors retarded the project's completion. Severe winter freezes in 1919-1920 made it impossible to lay cement during a large part of the year. Furthermore, the United States' entry into World War I precipitated shortages in labor and material. But when the final phases of construction were completed in late 1920, ranchers and farmers in northeastern New Mexico could depend on a reliable and consistent supply of irrigation water.

The construction of Eagle Nest Dam symbolizes the ingenuity and dedication of Colfax County settlers in their efforts to enhance the economic potential of a rich agricultural area. The region's subsequent development was greatly influenced by the completion of this important engineering project.

For one half a century Eagle Nest has provided water for the largest private irrigation project in New Mexico. Also the lake has become a significant recreation area in North Central New Mexico.

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