



US Army Corps
of Engineers
Mobile District

News Release

Release No. 07-27

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For Immediate Release:
May 15, 2007

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News Release: www.sam.usace.army.mil/pa/

Corps continues to monitor Lake Lanier water levels

Mobile, Ala. – The drought that is affecting the Southeast has left Lake Lanier lower than normal for this time of year. Dry conditions are projected to continue for the foreseeable future unless weather patterns change.

“Normally, the late winter and spring rains raise the lake to the summer pool level of 1071 mean sea level. However, conditions have been unusually dry and the lake level is approximately three feet below the normal for this time of year. During April the lake only received 39 percent of the historical inflow.,” said Patrick Robbins, Chief of Public Affairs. “Fortunately, adequate flows in the lower basin and the Flint River have provided the required flows to meet downstream endangered species and fish spawning requirements.

“This has allowed us to release the minimum required to meet water quality needs downstream, thus preserving as much water in the lake as possible. The corps has developed action zones (see sidebar) based on past operations to cover events such as droughts to manage water demands in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint basin. The lake is currently operating in Action Zone 1.”

The lack of rainfall will have greater impact on the lake in late summer. The current level 1068.38 has seen small fluctuations over the last month. As summer approaches, water demands will increase and the lake level will decrease. When this happens, the resource management office will implement the Plan for Low Water Levels at three stages. This plan explains the conditions that affect recreation and actions that will be taken.

“Lake Lanier is a multi-purpose reservoir and the corps must manage the lake to balance the demands for hydropower, navigation, fish and wildlife and recreation,” Robbins said. “The first impact from the lower pool will be felt by the recreation community.”

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2-2-2-2 Corps monitors Lake Lanier water level

The first thing visitors will notice when the lake approaches Action Zone 2, is the lower water levels in designated swim areas. Normally, a designated swim area is 6-7 feet at the deepest point. Currently, the deepest point in the swim areas is approximately 3-4 feet.

“The cool lake water looks inviting to swimmers; however, it is much riskier to swim outside the designated areas,” Robbins said. “The swim beaches are groomed to have an even surface. There are no sudden, deep drop-offs or submerged obstacles.”

Boat ramps are expected to remain open for the season. Boaters can continue to enjoy the center of the lake, but should exercise caution when boating near the shoreline, and they should also be sure to wear their life jackets when boating. “Wearing a life jacket can save your life,” Robbins said. “It is an extra precaution boaters should take whenever they are enjoying the lake.”

Action zones and lake level information can be found on the web at <http://water.sam.usace.army.mil>. The lake level is updated daily.

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SEE SIDEBAR FOR ACTION ZONE INFORMATION

Action Zones Sidebar

What the public needs to know about the action zones for Lake Lanier

Lake Lanier has the mission to manage resources for hydropower, flood control, recreation, water quality and supply, fish and wildlife as well as support to navigation. Mobile District has developed Action Zones to ensure the lake’s missions can be met.

Zone 1 indicates that releases can be made in support of seasonal navigation (when the channel has been adequately maintained), hydropower releases and water quality releases. If the all corps lakes on the Apalachicola-Chattahooche-Flint waterway are in Zone 1 or above, the river system would operate in a fairly normal manner. Designated swim areas are open, but the water level is approximately 3-4 feet at the deepest point in the designated swim area vice the usual 6-7 feet depth. Boat ramps are not affected.

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Zone 2 indicates that water to support seasonal navigation may be limited. Hydropower generation is supported at a reduced level. Water supply and water quality releases are met. Minimum flow targets are met. Some designated swim areas are unusable. Most of the boat ramps are open. Navigation aids may be posted to remind boaters to use caution when operating near the shoreline and to be aware of potential submerged obstacles.

Zone 3 indicates that water to support seasonal navigation may be significantly limited. Hydropower generation is supported at a reduced level. Water supply and water quality releases are met. Minimum flow targets are met. Most designated swim areas are unusable. Most boat ramps are open. Navigation aids may be posted to remind boaters to use caution when operating near the shoreline and to be aware of potential submerged obstacles.

Zone 4 indicates that navigation is not supported. Hydropower demands will be met at minimum level and may only occur for concurrent uses. Water supply and water quality releases are met. Minimum flow targets are met. Designated swim areas are unusable. Many boat ramps become unusable in early fall. Navigation aids may be posted to remind boater to use caution when operating near the shoreline and to be aware of potential submerged obstacles.

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