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Contact:
Leon Roberts, 615-736-7835
leon.a.roberts@usace.army.mil

Corps managing Cumberland River water levels

NASHVILLE, TENN. (March 8, 2011) – Following a series of three rain events that have moved through the region and Cumberland River Basin over the last couple weeks, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Nashville District reports that lake levels are up at many of their projects. However, river levels on the Cumberland River remain at seasonal levels, well below flood stage.

According to Bob Sneed, chief of the district's water management section, on average, the combined rainfall within the Cumberland for the three separate rain events has been about 5.5 inches. Several locations within the Corps' network of rain gages have had as much as seven to 10 inches of rain. The storm patterns have been such that a lot of the rain has fallen in areas that drain into lakes that have flood storage capability. This has allowed Corps' water managers to capture this water and to release it in a controlled manner to protect areas downstream.

Shortly after the last rain storm moved through the area over the weekend the Corps started the process of releasing water from storage in order to regain flood storage capacity. Corps water managers perform a thorough analysis of weather, stream flow, and lake level conditions on a daily basis. Sneed said that this is done in order to prepare for whatever comes next. It is important to manage the reservoir system to be able to respond to anticipated and what are sometimes unexpected rainfall events.

The Corps' flood control storage projects have been effective through these events at performing their function to hold back water from the Cumberland River at places like Carthage, Nashville, and Clarksville. As a result of storing large volumes of water, their respective lake levels have gone up significantly.

Status of the Cumberland Basin flood damage reduction projects:

- Wolf Creek Dam – The lake level this morning was elevation 705.4 feet and slowly rising. The lake level has gone up more than 24 feet as a result of these storms. All six hydropower units are currently in operation around the clock.
- Dale Hollow Dam - The lake level this morning was elevation 651.9 feet and slowly rising. The lake level has gone up about nine feet as a result of these storms. The two available hydropower units are currently in operation around the clock.
- Center Hill - The lake level this morning was elevation 641.7 feet and slowly rising. The lake level has gone up nearly 17 feet as a result of these storms. All three hydropower units are currently in operation around the clock.
- J. Percy Priest Dam - The lake level this morning was elevation 488.9 feet and falling. The current lake level is about six feet higher than when the rains started. The one hydropower

unit is being operated around the clock. In addition, spillway gate releases were initiated on Monday to accelerate the recovery of flood storage capacity in the lake.

The pattern of increased releases from the storage projects has resulted in larger Cumberland River flows from Celina all the way through Nashville. These flows are being managed through a combination of hydropower and spillway gate releases that allow the main river projects (Cordell Hull, Old Hickory, and Cheatham) to be operated at seasonal levels. This explains why the river level has actually gone up in Nashville over the last couple of days despite the rain having moved out of the area. Sneed said this is a typical flood damage reduction operation that demonstrates the importance of where rainfall occurs and how the projects with flood control capability are operated. The process of lowering lake levels at the storage projects will continue for anywhere from a few days to a few weeks depending on the project and future weather patterns.

Lake Barkley is the one Cumberland River project that is currently above the winter pool level but within storage guidelines. Lake Barkley, along with Kentucky Lake on the Tennessee River, provides valuable flood damage reduction benefits for the Lower Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Water is currently being stored in both lakes to lower the flood crest currently moving down the Ohio River resulting from heavy rains and snow melt experienced in the Ohio River Basin over the last few weeks.

The current lake level at Wolf Creek Dam is about one foot higher than any experienced since lake level restrictions were implemented in 2007. At Center Hill, a lake level about nine feet higher than the current level was observed in May 2009. Larger than normal releases will be required in the coming days and weeks from Wolf Creek and Center Hill dams to lower water levels as these dams that are undergoing major rehabilitation to address seepage problems. These continuous releases will be controlled in order to minimize impacts downstream.

During high water events the District Dam Safety Team closely monitors the condition and performance of all projects. This includes increasing visual inspections conducted by project staff and also the evaluation of critical instrumentation data to ensure the projects are operating safely. A review of daily dam safety instrumentation data collected at Wolf Creek and Center Hill dams indicates there are no ongoing issues or cause for concern. The Corps dam safety team is well trained and prepared to react to any change in condition at any of the Nashville District projects.

As necessary, news and information on the current rain event will be made available on the district's website at www.lrn.usace.army.mil, on Facebook at http://www.facebook.com/nashvillecorps, and on Twitter at http://www.twitter.com/nashvillecorps.

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U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS – NASHVILLE DISTRICT
801 Broadway, Nashville, Tenn. 37203
www.lrn.usace.army.mil