



**US Army Corps
Of Engineers®**
Nashville District
P.O. Box 1070
Nashville, TN 37202-1070

News Release

08-34
Release No.
December 5, 2008

Ed Evans Edward M. Evans@usace.army.mil
Contact:
(615) 736-7161

For Release:

Phone:

Low Water Levels Likely This Winter

NASHVILLE, TENN., Dec. 5, 2008 - The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is announcing that the Cumberland River system appears to be headed for lake levels at some projects that have not been observed since 1956. If the system does not receive significant rainfall runoff by the end of the year the system could be faced with some very difficult operational decisions regarding river and lake levels.

Extremely dry weather conditions coupled with lake level draw downs associated with ongoing repair work at Wolf Creek and Center Hill Dams has resulted in low lake levels at several area lakes. Lake Cumberland, which is impounded by Wolf Creek Dam, Dale Hollow Lake, and Center Hill Lake are the projects most affected by the low water conditions.

Corps of Engineers water managers are operating the Cumberland River Basin reservoir system in accordance with the interim operating plan developed prior to the onset of construction work at Wolf Creek Dam. At the same time, the lake level restrictions set for Wolf Creek Dam and Center Hill Dam have severely reduced the volume of water available to Corps of Engineers water managers.

Bob Sneed, who oversees water management activities for the Cumberland River Basin projects explains, "We started out the summer season with only about one-fourth the normal volume of water in the reservoir system. This limitation is far more extreme than any drought that we have experienced since the reservoir system was completed."

-more-

To Better Serve The Public

The Cumberland reservoir system is designed to store a large volume of cold water in the late winter and spring and then release that water from storage during the summer and fall when natural stream flows will not meet the water demands placed on the system. According to Sneed, “In 2007 and 2008 we have operated the system according to the priorities established in the interim operating plan.” The system priorities detailed in the plan are 1) water supply, 2) water quality, 3) navigation, 4) hydropower, and 5) recreation. The reservoir system continues to be available for flood damage reduction operations as needed.

Corps of Engineers water managers continue to work closely with representatives from federal, state, and local agencies, and various water users to reduce or eliminate the impacts from this limited supply of water in order to conserve and stretch resources. The basic approach has been to route the minimum volume of water through the reservoir system needed to maintain an uninterrupted water supply to water intakes, avoid serious environmental consequences, and keep commercial navigation traffic moving. Hydropower production and certain forms of recreation have been the areas most impacted by this operational plan.

Dry conditions throughout the Cumberland Basin this summer and fall has meant lake levels in the large tributary projects have continued to fall. The lake level at Dale Hollow is now at elevation 634.3. This is approximately 0.7 ft lower than it was on this date one year ago. The current lake level is the lowest it has been since November 1983 when it reached elevation 632.8. The record low lake level for Dale Hollow of 631.1 was observed in January 1956. Current projections, based on no significant rainfall, call for the Dale Hollow elevation to continue to fall to around elevation 633 by the end of the year.

Water flowing through the main-stem navigation projects -- Cordell Hull, Old Hickory, Cheatham, and Barkley -- along the Cumberland River will continue to be very low, but lake levels at these projects are not expected to fall to critical levels.

Lake visitors are being asked to use caution and be aware there may be unmarked structures underwater that could damage vessels. Visitors should also be mindful of wakes, tie-ups and prop washout when launching or near the bank. These courtesies will help ensure that current conditions do not add to the problem of shoreline erosion.

At each of the affected lakes, boaters planning to use ramps located within marina lease areas are encouraged to contact that marina to obtain the status of individual ramps. Corps of Engineers ramps may be used at the boater's discretion, but during this period of low water, it is best to always check the condition of the ramp prior to launching.