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Contact:
Bill Peoples, 615-736-7161
William.l.peoples@usace.army.mil

Nashville District storage projects begin to release water

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (May 5, 2011) – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Nashville District has begun to release water from its storage projects.

The Cumberland River Basin has been subjected to a series of heavy rainfall events going back to late February. The Corps of Engineers elected to store water from these storms in reservoirs to lower river levels and to alleviate flooding on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, which are experiencing record flooding.

A large volume of water, approximately 3,234,000 acre-feet, has been captured in the Cumberland Basin flood storage projects, resulting in significant increases to their lake levels. For example, the lake level at Wolf Creek Dam has gone up about 45 feet since late February. Dale Hollow Lake has seen a rise of approximately 16 feet over the same period. Likewise, Center Hill has risen by approximately 31 feet, and J. Percy Priest has seen a rise of nearly 18 feet.

The figure 3,234,000 acre-feet of water is roughly equivalent to one trillion gallons of water or if stacked on a football field it would be about 593 miles high.

The Corps of Engineers has started the process of recovering flood storage capacity in lakes impacted by the recent series of heavy rain events. This course of action will require the continuous release of water for an extended period of time. The projects involved include Wolf Creek Dam (Lake Cumberland), Dale Hollow Dam, Center Hill Dam, and J. Percy Priest Dam.

Project releases were initiated May 4 at Wolf Creek Dam in Eastern Kentucky. The flows at Wolf Creek will be increased over the next couple of days until all six hydropower releases are in use. This schedule will be followed until the flood storage capacity is restored. Depending on rainfall patterns and the need to adjust the release schedule to reduce downstream flooding potential, the process to return the project to the target lake level may take several weeks to complete.

Hydropower releases were also initiated at J. Percy Priest Dam on May 4. That release will be supplemented with spillway gate releases through an operation scheduled the morning of May 6.

At Dale Hollow, hydropower releases were initiated this morning. Spillway gates are scheduled to be opened at Dale Hollow on May 7, 2011. This will be the third consecutive May that spillway releases

will be required at Dale Hollow. Prior to May 2009 the Dale Hollow spillways had not been used since March 1989.

The process to lower lake levels at Center Hill will be initiated at midnight tonight when the first of three hydropower units is brought on-line. By the end of the day on May 6, 2011 all three hydropower units will be in use.

The current water control plan for Barkley Dam on the Cumberland River in Western Kentucky is to hold the current discharge of 90,000 cubic feet per second for the next several days. This action is being taken to keep excess water out of the Ohio River at locations that are currently at or near their flood crest. This discharge plan supports starting the process of recovering flood storage capacity in Lake Barkley and Kentucky Lake. This is an important process to complete in advance of future rainfall events. The water control plans for the operation of Barkley Dam on the Cumberland River and Kentucky Dam on the Tennessee River are being carried out from a regional perspective by the Corps' Great Lakes and Ohio River Division Water Management Team located in Cincinnati, Ohio. Water Management decisions for these two important flood damage reduction projects are closely coordinated with National Weather Service and Corps of Engineers staff covering the entire Ohio and Mississippi River Basins.

The release of all this water from the upstream storage projects will result in larger flows and in some cases higher water levels in the Cumberland River. This will be most noticeable in Nashville where the river stage will be elevated, but is forecast to remain below either the action level or flood level designations. Corps water managers are closely monitoring conditions along the Cumberland River to coordinate the releases from the upstream projects with runoff entering the river from tributary streams within the uncontrolled portion of the basin. The uncontrolled portion of the Cumberland Basin includes the watersheds associated with the Cordell Hull, Old Hickory, and Cheatham projects.

As necessary, news and information regarding this stream bank stabilization will be made available on the district's website at www.lrn.usace.army.mil, on Facebook at http://www.facebook.com/nashvillecorps and http://www.facebook.com/dalehollowlake, and on Twitter at http://www.twitter.com/nashvillecorps. For more information about the Memphis District, go to http://www.mvm.usace.army.mil/. For more information about the Louisville District, go to http://www.lrl.usace.army.mil/.

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