



NEWS RELEASE

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

BUILDING STRONG

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Upper Savannah reservoirs enter Drought Level 1 this week

SAVANNAH, Ga. –The three reservoirs on the Savannah River operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reached the first drought trigger level earlier this week and Corps officials immediately reduced water discharges from the system.

Corps officials urge the public to use caution when boating, swimming or fishing during the next weeks. As the reservoir levels decline, underwater obstructions will be closer to the surface. This is particularly dangerous for boaters and skiers. Swimmers should not venture outside designated swimming areas. All visitors should wear a life jacket when swimming, boating or fishing. Dock owners may need to move their docks to remain in adequately deep water.

“The reservoirs began the summer in a good position to endure a long, hot, dry summer,” said Peggy O’Bryan, Chief of the Operations Division for the Savannah District. “Hartwell Lake was maintained above full pool for April and May which helped keep the both reservoirs up and water in the system.

Under the existing drought plan, the Corps limits outflow from Thurmond Dam to 4,200 cubic feet per second, averaged over the week. Reducing outflow decreases the amount of hydropower that generated through the dams but conserves more water in the reservoirs.

Earlier in the month, to conserve more water in the three-reservoir system but still meet hydropower demands, workers increased the pump-back operation of the Russell Dam. Pump-back allows the Corps to generate electricity at the Russell Dam during peak afternoon demand times then reverse turbine direction at night to return the water for reuse the next day, providing power even during drought.

“The Corps’ water management staff works daily to meet as many needs for as many users as possible throughout the Savannah River basin,” O’Bryan said. The other congressionally-authorized purposes of the reservoirs include water supply, water quality, recreation, flood risk management, navigation, and fish and wildlife management. “We know that the actions we take affect many people directly and we take that responsibility very seriously. While some believe we should retain as much water as possible in the reservoirs, but doing so poses heavy hardships on thousands of users downstream.”

Augusta and Savannah in Georgia and North Augusta and Jasper County in South Carolina withdraw drinking water from the river. Industries and utilities use river water. Threatened and endangered species and the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge also depend on the river.

The pool elevation on July 26 was 656.3 feet above mean sea level (ft-msl) at Hartwell Lake, and 325.8 ft-msl at Thurmond Lake. Trigger Level 1 is 656 ft-msl for Hartwell and 326 ft-msl for Thurmond. Due to on-going gate repairs, levels at Thurmond Lake needed to remain two feet or more below summer full pool to ensure worker safety. Currently, Hartwell averages only 40 percent of normal amount of water entering the reservoir from rainfall, rivers, and streams. Thurmond's water inflow is about 36 percent of normal. Precipitation forecasts show little rain for the region in upcoming weeks. Hydrologists with the Savannah District predict that water levels at lakes Hartwell and Thurmond will continue to decline in the typical summer pattern.

For more information on current lake levels and projections, contact the Savannah District Corporate Communications Office at 912-652-5014, or visit the District's lake-level website at <http://water.sas.usace.army.mil>.

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The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' [Savannah District](#) manages [three lakes and hydroelectric dams](#) along the Savannah River. It also oversees a multi-billion dollar [military construction](#) program at 11 Army and Air Force installations in Georgia and North Carolina. Corps' projects range from barracks, hospitals and clinics to equipment shops, headquarters buildings and aircraft hangars. The Savannah District also has oversight and maintains additional civil works projects – from the Savannah and Brunswick harbors to the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway.