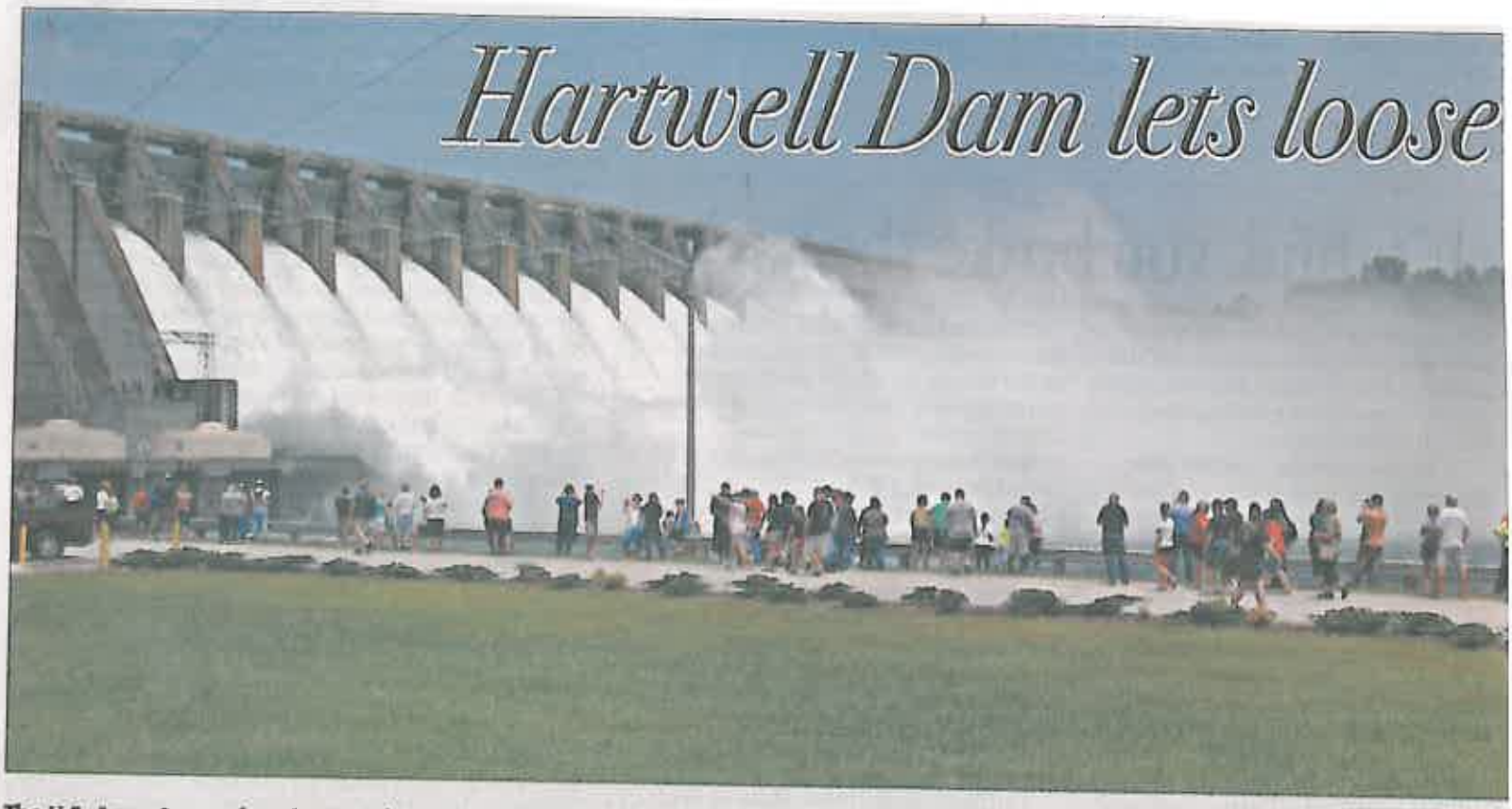
Hartwell Dam lets loose



The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers release the spillway gates at Hartwell Dam on Tuesday in an effort to stem the rising waters that caused the 665 feet, or nearly 5 feet above full pool. Afterward, Corps officials said the lake had dropped to 664.8 feet and that the gates would remain c dropped to 660 feet.

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

HART COUNTY, Ga. — For the first time since Aug. 18, 1994, the United States Army Corps of Engineers released water from Hartwell Dam's flood gate spillways Tuesday morning.

With Lake Hartwell at more than 5 feet above full pool, spokesman Billy Birdwell indicated that the lake had reached a flood storage level where it was an operational requirement to use the flood gates to release water.

"Ordinarily we prefer to release water through the turbines so that electricity can be generated," said Birdwell. "But we reached a peak flood storage level and are required to open the flood gates at that point."

Flood gates were opened at around 2:30 a.m. Tuesday to a few inches, and the level was gradually increased throughout the day when the gates were opened to a maximum of 3 feet, then later closed around 3:15 p.m. The spectacle drew a large lunchtime crowd at the USACE viewing facility below the dam in Hart County, Ga.

"I can't remember the last time they let water go from the top of the dam," said Tricia Spearman of Anderson, who took her kids to visit the dam after a neighbor called and said she had heard about the release. "It's absolutely beautiful; it looks like Niagara Falls."

Birdwell said the lake level at Hartwell was still above full pool at 664.5 feet. The last time the flood gates were opened prior to Tuesday's release and in 1994 was on March 8, 1964.

"It is a rare occurrence," said Birdwell, "but flood control is one of the primary operations of all of the Corps facilities on the Savannah River chain."

With above-normal releases, river velocities below the area dams will be much higher than normal. Boaters, anglers, and others using the river below these dams should exercise extreme caution and should wear a life jacket at all times when on or even near the river. Some low-lying areas could be inundated.

Dock owners at all locations should be prepared to adjust their docks if necessary. The Corps of Engineers has received reports of large debris in the reservoirs and in the Savannah River as well as some inundated signs. Some recreation areas and facilities including boat ramps and courtesy docks have closed due to high water.



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lake to reach flood level of nearly
pen until all flood storage pools