Lake Hartwell drought situation grows

BY ERIC SPROTT
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — With the start of all only a day away, it's only a natter of time before there's a velcomed chill in the night air nd the long sleeves are broken ut.

But putting that imagery side, the start of fall this week s a technicality at best, with emperatures continuing to each the 90s on a daily basis, nd yet another reminder of his year's hot, dry summer eared its head Tuesday.

In a news release, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced the three reservoirs t operates on the upper Savannah River — including Lake Hartwell — entered drought evel two for the first time since August 2011 as of early Monday morning.

When any one of the lakes dips below a certain level, all three are classified at the appropriate drought level. The trigger Monday came when Lake Thurmond dipped below 324 feet above mean level, as it checked in at 323.97 feet.



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A dry summer has left little water under the boardwalk at the Larry Abernathy Waterfront Park in Clemson, pictured here Tuesday, the same day it was announced Lake Hartwell has entered drought level two for the first time since August 2011.

Lake Hartwell was not far from hitting its own trigger point of 654 feet Monday afternoon, as it measured at 654.81 feet. An update on Lake Russell was not given in the news release.

The news came as somewhat of a surprise, as the Corps said rainfall in all three reservoir sub-basins exceeded normal in August after the reservoirs entered drought level one on July 25. The organization said no single event provided the basin with massive runoff, but steady and consistent small rain events kept the reservoirs at a relatively flat level.

"Below-average rainfall in 2016 gradually reduced inflows into the reservoirs," Stan Simpson, a hydrologist and senior water manager for the Savannah District, said at the time. "However, because of very heavy rains early last winter, the reservoirs and inflowing tributaries kept the reservoirs full. By following our long-established water manual, we managed to keep reservoirs above drought triggers in spite of the rain deficit."

Water managers for the Savannah District began coordination with the Southeastern Power Administration to reduce outflows from the Thurmond Dam to 4,000 cubic feet per second. They expect to reach this reduction by Saturday in order to give SEPA time to make other arrangements for electrical generation.

The Broad River, an unregulated tributary feeding the Savannah River and Lake Thurmond, is currently flowing at 16 percent of its 30-day average flow. Should the Broad River drop below 10 percent, the district's drought plan calls for further reductions in outflows from the Thurmond Dam.

Corps officials urge boaters to use extreme caution when on the reservoir. Rocks and tree stumps, normally deep underwater, will be closer to the surface, and some just out of sight.

Boaters should use the main channel whenever possible, and all reservoir visitors should wear a life jacket whenever in, on or near the water.

grimmer

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