

# Lake releases could drop in winter

Plan would leave more water in Hartwell if drought occurs during low-demand time

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A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers proposal would leave more water in Upstate lakes in winter drought, a direction some Upstate residents say is good but not enough. Drought is creeping back into

South Carolina, where on Friday the state drought response committee upgraded 26 counties in the lower part of the state to moderate drought status.

Twenty counties including the Upstate remain in incipient drought, the lowest level, said state climatologist Hope Mizzell.

Lake Hartwell was 1 foot low Friday, which is average for this time of year, according to corps data.

The corps' proposal would lower required downstream releases during severe drought in winter months, when downstream demand is less.

Public comments on the proposed change to the corps' Drought Contingency Plan are

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## DROUGHT

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due by noon on July 14.

Outflows from the Thurmond Dam would be cut from 3,600 to 3,100 cubic feet per second in November through February if lake levels reach drought level 4. That corresponds to a 35-foot drop in Lake Hartwell, which fell to an unprecedented 22-foot low in December 2008.

However, another three-foot drop in Thurmond in the recent drought would have triggered level 4 across all three lakes because they're managed as a single system, said Billy Birdwell, a corps spokesman.

Having a decision in place before drought hits "makes a lot of sense," said Herb Burnham, president of the Lake Hartwell Association. "The last couple of times they made the decision to cut back it was after we had already gone down in the winter."

Making the change sooner, at level 2 or 3, would better protect the lakes before they drop so low, Burnham said. Those levels are six and 14 feet below full pond, respectively.

Col. Jeff Hall, command-

er of the corps' Savannah District, said the change would add flexibility "to conserve the remaining water in the reservoirs without additional adverse impacts on the environment both upstream and downstream."

The proposal could be opposed in coastal areas in the Savannah where flow is relied upon for municipal, industrial and environmental needs and to keep salt water out of drinking water intakes.

The proposal comes after evaluation of the current drought plan and a study of the 2006-2009 record-setting drought that exposed old road beds long under Lake Hartwell and left docks and boat ramps high and dry.

Hall said the corps reviewed its actions during the recent drought to see where any refinement in the current drought plan was needed.

The proposal would require the corps to restore outflows to 3,600 cubic feet per second if requested by South Carolina or Georgia.

Comments can be submitted electronically to CESAS-PD@usace.army.mil or by mail to US Army Corps of Engineers, Attn: PD, Savannah District, P.O. Box 889, Savannah, GA 31402-0889.