Local lake levels up in a big way

Hartwell has risen 20 feet since December's record low

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Lake levels across the Golden Corner continue to recover after a drought of nearly two years.

In December, Lake Hartwell reached a record low of 637 feet above mean sea level. Since then, a wet spell in March, a fair April and a soggy May have raised the lake to 657.51 feet, only two feet shy of its target level.

"We're about two feet below, but right now we're still on the rise," Billy Birdwell of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said.

There is significantly more surface area to Hartwell, as it gets fuller due to the rough "V" shape of the lake, Birdwell said, making it rise slowly as it reaches the targeted level.

"We were balancing the two reservoirs for much of this year. Lake Thurmond was out of balance and was fuller than Hartwell so we, for a time, just stopped Hartwell's outflows altogether," Birdwell explained. "Now that situation has reversed itself. Hartwell is now out of balance with Thurmond in the other direction."

In an attempt to find a proper balance between the two, engineers have increased Hartwell's releases from 3,500 cubic feet per second to between 3,800 and 5,800 CFS, depending on the day. No releases are made on weekends.

June has provided a fair amount of rain to stabilize the Savannah River Basin's levels.

So far Hartwell and the rest of the basin have benefited from roughly 1.5 inches of precipitation in the first nine days of June, equaling all of last June's rainfall total. The month brings in about five inches of rain on average.