



The Alabama drought of 2007 saw Lake Martin drop to historic lows. Photo by Kenneth Boone

Plan in Place for Future Drought



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Are we prepared for the next major drought? What can anyone do to lessen the impact of a terrible drought? Have you ever seen your dock high and dry on July 4th?

A little known and seldom discussed benefit during the relicensing process of Lake Martin Dam was that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission required the implementation of a drought program for the Tallapoosa River. Called the Alabama Drought Response Operating Proposal, the plan was instituted as a result of 2007's devastating drought in Alabama.

We have already seen benefits of the new ADROP program. Last winter our lake level was temporarily raised 2 feet above normal winter level because of drought conditions at the time. Simply monitoring the flow rates of the rivers and reacting to drought conditions as they develop may lessen the impacts to lake levels, which hurt the economies of all of us.

How in the world did such a good thing come about? Well, as a result of the drought of 2007, which saw lake levels on Lake Martin drop to historic lows, Alabama Power, along with the assistance of state and federal agencies, led an effort to develop a plan to address future droughts. Out of that effort, the ADROP program was developed.

A good question to ask is, "How do we know there's a drought?"

Obviously, when there's not enough rain we call it a drought, but much more sophisticated information is available from 11 stream flow gauges on the Coosa River and seven gauges on the Tallapoosa River. When hydrologic conditions, as indicated by stream flows and rainfall amounts, worsen in the basin, the ADROP program is implemented and provides three levels of action that are designed to reduce the impact of a drought in the lakes controlled by APC in the Alabama, Coosa, Tallapoosa River Basin.

Within ADROP, there are three levels of responses that dictate the necessary action permitted to minimize the effects of drought on the entire ACT River Basin. With each level of drought intensity, more conservation actions are implemented.

Water releases from dams are reduced as an effort to conserve storage in APC lakes, while those releases also support some level of downstream need. Also, APC must seek variances from USACE and FERC to temporarily raise winter lake levels above normal levels as an effort to help ensure the lakes fill to summer levels.

The winter of 2016-2017 was an example of this action, as our lake level was temporarily raised 2 feet at that time. Currently, Lake Harris is temporarily being held 2 feet above normal because the area is experiencing drought conditions.

Since the ADROP program has been in effect, we have not experienced a really bad drought period as we saw in 2007, but every indication is that this program will offer all lake lovers some real protection against the terrible effects of a long-lasting severe drought.

No, ADROP will not make it rain, and it is not a plan to keep lakes full, but it certainly will help protect the water we already have in our lakes.

The Lake Martin Home Owners and Boat Owners Association would like to thank Alabama Power Company and the state and federal agencies that worked behind the scenes to make the program a reality. We have already seen the effects of the efforts to make ADROP work. Lake Martin is far better prepared for the next drought than it has ever been. Thanks.

The complete ADROP document is available at lakemartinhobos.com (<http://lakemartinhobos.com>). In left column, click on AL Drought Program.

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