

News



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Alabama Power cuts flows at hydro dams

BIRMINGHAM – Alabama Power today reduced the flow of water from hydroelectric dams on the Coosa and Tallapoosa Rivers by 10 percent. It is the latest effort by the company to conserve dwindling water supplies during the ongoing drought.

The reduction will cut flows into the Alabama River above Montgomery from 4,640 cubic feet per second (CFS) to about 4,175 CFS. While the reduction will slow the rate of decline of water levels in Alabama Power reservoirs on the two rivers, the reservoirs are expected to continue to drop through the summer and into the fall.

“We’re glad the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has agreed to release more water into Alabama from Georgia, and has granted us limited relief as far as the minimum flows we must move through our dams,” said Willard Bowers, Alabama Power’s vice president of Environmental Affairs.

In addition, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has granted the company’s request to conduct a study on how reduced flows may affect an endangered species of freshwater snail below Jordan Dam. The company will work with FERC and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in conducting the study.

“The combination of these actions will improve our ability to manage the very limited amount of water that is available during this drought,” Bowers said. “But people should understand that the drought is far from over. Conditions remain serious and are likely to get worse as we head into the fall.”

In May, Alabama Power sought relief from the Corps of Engineers to reduce the amount of water the company must release from its dams. The company also asked the Corps to let more water flow into Alabama from Corps reservoirs in Georgia. Earlier today, the Corps agreed to release some additional water from Georgia and to grant a 10 percent reduction in the minimum required flow from Alabama Power hydro projects on the Coosa and Tallapoosa above Montgomery.

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Despite the relief, company officials project that by Sept. 1, Weiss Lake on the Coosa River and Harris and Martin Lakes on the Tallapoosa River will be at or below winter pool – a level not normally seen until early December.

This year's drought is the worst ever recorded for north and central Alabama. Streams that feed Alabama Power lakes are at historic lows for this time of year. In addition, evaporation is having a significant impact on the reservoirs. Since April, Alabama Power lakes have lost about 1.5 feet of elevation from evaporation alone.

Earlier this year, Alabama Power reduced the water it releases from its dams to the minimum required by the company's federal hydroelectric project licenses. The company also suspended recreational releases of water from Jordan Dam.

Alabama Power must make certain releases from the lakes to meet requirements for navigation, fisheries, water supply and water quality. During the ongoing drought, the company has operated its hydro facilities with one purpose in mind: to manage the extremely limited water resources in the most effective way.

Alabama Power intends to stay in close contact with water management staff at the Corps district offices in Mobile in monitoring the effect of the flow reduction on water quality, wildlife and navigation. The company will also communicate closely with the office of Alabama Gov. Bob Riley, with FERC, Fish and Wildlife, the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management and the state Office of Water Resources. The company will also work to keep industry and the public informed about its hydro operations.

With Alabama Power storage reservoirs still expected to see declines in water levels, individuals with boats and other water-related equipment and facilities should remain alert to changing conditions and be prepared to take the necessary steps to protect their property.

For the latest on lake levels and Alabama Power's efforts to manage through the drought, visit www.alabamapower.com and click on "drought." Information can also be obtained by calling Alabama Power's automated Reservoir Information System at 1-800-LAKES11 (1-800-525-3711).

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