



Sept. 27, 2007

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Ongoing drought forces further cuts in water releases to Alabama River

Effort aimed at improving odds of refilling lakes in 2008

BIRMINGHAM – With extreme drought conditions continuing, Alabama Power is announcing further reductions in downstream flows into the Alabama River, beginning next month. The effort is designed to conserve water and improve the chances of refilling by next spring the company's five storage reservoirs on the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers.

"The record-setting drought, and the likelihood of continuing dry weather, make these flow reductions absolutely necessary," said Willard Bowers, Alabama Power's vice president of environmental affairs. "Without these additional steps, the outlook for refilling our storage reservoirs on the Coosa and Tallapoosa next spring is bleak."

In July, with approval from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alabama Power reduced by 10 percent the amount of water it releases into the Alabama River to support federal navigation requirements.

Since then, all of Alabama's storage reservoirs have fallen below winter pool – a level not normally seen until early December. With conditions continuing to deteriorate on Alabama Power lakes, and long-term forecasts showing no signs of significant rain, the company will reduce flows into the Alabama River by another 10 percent on Oct. 8, with additional cuts scheduled for Oct. 15, 22, 29 and Nov. 5. When fully enacted, the reductions will cut by more than half the normal, daily, minimum flow releases into the Alabama River, from 4,640 cubic feet per second (cfs) to about 2,000 cfs.

- More -

Drought forces further cuts in water releases to Alabama River

Page 2

The company will still be required to make certain minimum releases to protect an endangered snail in the Coosa River below Jordan Dam and to benefit the fishery in the Tallapoosa River downstream of Thurlow Dam. The company is reducing the amount of water released below Jordan Dam as part of its drought-management efforts.

The newly announced flow reductions are subject to change, depending on weather conditions, inflows from upstream sources, and downstream conditions that may require special releases.

Even with the flow reductions, reservoir levels are not expected to rise through the end of the year. Rather, the reductions are designed to help slow the continuing decline in reservoir levels on the Coosa and Tallapoosa systems until winter rains arrive. Those rains are vital for refilling the lakes by next spring.

The company owns and operates three storage reservoirs on the Coosa: Weiss Lake, Lake Neely Henry and Lake Logan Martin. The company has two storage reservoirs on the Tallapoosa: Lake Harris and Lake Martin.

The company's three "run-of-the-river" lakes on the Coosa – Lay Lake, Lake Mitchell and Lake Jordan – will also remain below their typical levels at least through the end of October. The three lakes, which normally do not fluctuate like the storage reservoirs, have also seen their levels decline as the company works to manage the limited water resources available during this record drought.

The ongoing drought is the worst ever measured in Alabama. Many of the streams that feed Alabama Power lakes have posted record-low flows this year.

With extremely dry conditions persisting, people should remain alert to changing conditions on Alabama Power reservoirs and be prepared to take the necessary steps to protect their property.

For the latest on lake levels, visit www.alabamapower.com and click on the "drought" icon. 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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