

Move to bolster Georgia lake feared to be harmful to Lake Martin

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Anyone interested in the welfare of Lake Martin is encouraged to submit comments to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in a matter that could adversely affect summer pool levels, said Lake Martin Resource Association (LMRA) Legal Officer Steve Forehand and President John Thompson.

“The Corps has updated the water control manual for the Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa River Basin, and some operational changes could have a dramatic impact on Lake Martin,” Forehand said. “The comment period on these changes closes Feb. 5, and it’s important to file comments before that deadline.”

Lake Martin’s summer pool levels are vulnerable in that the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the manual revision recommends operational changes for Lake Allatoona in Georgia, Thompson explained.

“The changes are ostensibly for recreation, but it is apparent that the proposed changes are designed to preserve the water for Atlanta, to the detriment of Alabama,” Thompson wrote in a newsletter to LMRA members. “Alabama Power Company is required to release enough water from its projects to support a flow of 4,640 cubic feet per second at the Montgomery Water Works gauge (Alabama River). If the flow is decreased in the Coosa River (from water withholding at Allatoona), that flow requirement will mean that proportionately more water will have to come from the Tallapoosa River, potentially resulting in lower levels in Lake Martin.”

Comments must be made in writing and mailed or hand delivered to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers office in Mobile by Feb. 5.

LMRA has filed comments that make the following three summarized points:

The Environmental Impact Statement does not take into consideration Alabama Power Company’s current proposal that the winter pool for Lake Martin be increased by 3 feet.

The Environmental Impact Statement states that Lake Martin has almost half of the conservation storage in the Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa Basin by measuring the storage capacity down to an elevation of 445 feet, which is in violation of Alabama Power Company’s current operating agreement that maintains the lake level between 480 in the winter and 490 in the summer, and also ignores the need for drought contingency, drinking water withdrawal and recreation use on Lake Martin.

The Environmental Impact Statement proposes water should be held in Lake Allatoona for recreation purposes, while ignoring the impact that a lower water level would have on downstream recreation in Lake Martin and other areas of the basin.

The issue is not a new one to the lake but has come to a head recently with the manual revision. Dave Heinzen, president of Lake Martin's Home Owners and Boat Owners Association, discussed the matter in a December 2013 article in *Lakemagazine*, noting the Corps was a player in the relicensing of Martin Dam, which is still in process, though a decision is expected this spring.

LMRA contends that the modeling for the Corps manual revision is faulty, as it overstates the capacity of Lake Martin by measuring water reserves down to the turbine level on the dam, which would render the turbines inoperable.

Forehand said the Corps of Engineers also has made the assumption that Atlanta is using only the contractual limits of the present manual, which has been in use since 1951, but records indicate those limits have been ignored without consequence for a long time now.

"That gives them an artificial measure, and the assumptions on their model are wrong," Forehand said. "As this process continues, it will be very important that stakeholder comments are of record in this matter, so we urge everyone with any interest in Lake Martin to send comments immediately."

A spokesman for Alabama Power Company confirmed LMRA's summary of the manual's potential impact on Lake Martin.

"During the draft comment period, Alabama Power's review team identified and filed comments on several concerns we had with the water manual we hoped the Corps of Engineers would address in their final plan," said spokesman Brandon Glover. "While many of our concerns were not addressed in the final plan, we again plan to provide input we hope will be seriously considered and incorporated as part of the comment period that ends Feb. 5."

For more thorough coverage of this issue, look for the February issue of *Lakemagazine*, due out Saturday, Jan. 31.

MAKE YOUR FEELINGS KNOWN:

Comments about the Corps of Engineers Water Manual for the Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa Basin should be made in writing and mailed or hand-delivered to:

Commander, Mobile District

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Attn: PD-EI (ACT-EIS)

P.O. Box 2288

Mobile AL 36628

The reference line should read: Final Environmental Impact Statement, Update of Water Control Manual for Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa Basin.