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Walla Walla District

News Release

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Heat wave forecasted – Dworshak flows aim to assist outmigrating salmon; Independence Day recreation opportunities still abound at reservoir

AHSAHKA, Idaho – Water releases increased at Dworshak Dam and Reservoir today to help cool water temperatures for ESA-listed outmigrating juvenile salmon in the lower Snake River, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officials announced today.

Early morning evaluation of current water temperatures and forecasted increases in air temperatures prompted the decision by the Fish Passage Advisory Committee to increase cool-water flows from Dworshak. The FPAC is a regional group composed of biologists and fish managers from NOAA-Fisheries; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Idaho, Washington and Oregon states' fish and wildlife agencies, Native American tribes and the Fish Passage Center which evaluates in-river conditions for ESA-listed fish and makes recommendations to regional water managers to adjust operations as necessary.

“We’re obligated under the Endangered Species Act to support these decisions to maintain healthy in-river conditions for salmon and steelhead,” said Cindy Henriksen, Chief of the Corps’ Northwestern Division Reservoir Control Center.

With air temperatures nearing 100 during recent days and near-record high temperatures, between 99-110 degrees, expected later this week, the cold mountain run-off water from Dworshak Reservoir is crucial to maintain water temperatures in the lower Snake River. Temperature gages on the river downstream of Hells Canyon Dam near Anatone, Wash., and downstream of Clarkston near Spalding, Wash., showed temperatures yesterday reaching 69 and 62 degrees, respectively. Biologists advise that water temperatures exceeding 68 degrees can have an adverse impact to outmigrating juvenile salmon and steelhead. Dworshak Reservoir’s 44-45 degree waters which flow into the Clearwater River can have a significant cooling effect on lower Snake River temperatures past the confluence.

Flows from Dworshak Reservoir began increasing at 10 a.m. today from 4,300 cubic feet per second (cfs) to 7,400 cfs. At 7,400 cfs, the reservoir level will drop 6 inches in 24 hours. Starting at 6 a.m. tomorrow, flows will further increase to 9,500 cfs, or 8.5 inches in 24 hours. Water managers plan to reevaluate conditions on July 5 to better determine needs for continued flows.

Outdoor recreation opportunities shouldn’t be affected by the increase in flows through the Fourth of July, said Corps recreation officials.

“All campgrounds and boat ramps are open for use – the reservoir was nearly full when these water releases started, and at the rate of flow currently projected, shouldn’t impact visitors’ use of the boat ramps,” said Paul Pence, natural resources manager at the dam. “The fishing has been great lately, and we’re encouraging folks to come out here to enjoy some summer outdoor fun during the Fourth of July.”

Boat operators should be sure to keep the fluctuating reservoir levels in mind when anchoring near the shoreline, said Pence. He recommends boaters anchor off a bit further from shore than usual to avoid beaching their vessel as the reservoir lowers several inches during overnight hours.

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While visiting Dworshak Dam and Reservoir during the Fourth of July holiday, it's important to remember to leave some things behind, according to Corps park and recreation officials. Fireworks of any kind are prohibited in all the Corps' parks and on its lands across the District. Restrictions aren't intended to limit visitors' ability to celebrate but rather to help all visitors have an incident-free occasion.

The Corps and law enforcement officials will be patrolling facilities through the holiday, according to Mike Deitrick, Corps park manager at Dworshak. Anyone found lighting or in possession of fireworks on Corps property will be asked to remove the items immediately to resolve the situation. "The last thing we want to have to do is end up writing citations for someone," said Deitrick.

Ultimately, Corps recreation officials hope visitors will recognize and appreciate that safety is everybody's responsibility.

In addition, the reserving of mini-camp sites along the Dworshak Reservoir shoreline is prohibited. Early placement of camping equipment at mini-camp sites in an attempt to save a spot for the July 4 holiday can result in the removal of the camping equipment or a citation if personal gear is left unattended for an extended period.

Please enjoy the reservoir safely this weekend, by taking the following precautions:

- Changing weather conditions can create unsafe situations on open water. Know the weather and have a float plan.
- Keep life jackets on children while on or around the water.
- Don't let small children out of your sight.
- Check the serviceability of your boat.
- Ensure proper fitting, accessible and serviceable life vests are available for each occupant on your boat. Better yet, wear them.
- Before proceeding at higher speeds, familiarize yourself with the area you will be boating as there may be floating woody debris or rocks, stumps and shallow areas not visible from the surface.
- When boating on the reservoir, please use caution because lake levels can change quickly – anchor your boat in water deep enough to avoid beaching and leave enough slack in your anchorline to avoid sinking should lake levels fluctuate up or down.

The Dworshak Dam Visitor Center is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily. The Visitor Center offers a variety of interpretive displays and movies about Dworshak and the history of the area. For more information, visitors are welcome to call the Corps of Engineers at (800) 321-3198, the Visitor's Center at (208) 476-1255. Reservations for Dent Acres can be made at (877) 444-6777 or at www.recreation.gov. Information about Dworshak and other Corps recreation opportunities is available on Walla Walla District's Web site at www.nww.usace.army.mil.

For more information about regional water-management activities, go online to the Corps' Columbia Basin Water Management Division Web site at www.nwd-wc.usace.army.mil.

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