

Water Level Management Update

Volume 2, Issue 2

December 1999

Happy Holidays and welcome to the fourth newsletter discussing the potential water level reduction in Upper Mississippi River Pool 8.

Reduction Has Final Approval Now we Need Moisture

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers St. Paul District has received approval from their Mississippi Valley Division to conduct a pilot water level reduction on Pool 8. The target reduction at Lock and Dam 8 is 18 inches with the condition that the maximum reduction level at the La Crosse gage be 6 inches. This approval comes with the caveat that the St. Paul District must have the funds available to do advance dredging to maintain the 9-foot channel in Pool 8. During the past fall, the Corps was able to do some advance dredging in the problem areas of Pool 8 and will continue to dredge in the spring. This should provide adequate depth for commercial navigation to pass through Pool 8 if the water level reduction occurs.

The optimum conditions for the reduction will occur when water passing through Lock and Dam 8 is between about 28,000 and 50,000 cubic feet per second (cfs). Within these levels, a full reduction will be achieved at the Lock and Dam with a minimal affect to the upper pool. Once the levels go below 28,000 cfs the reduction at the dam (18 inches) will have to be decreased (water raised) to maintain a six inch maximum reduction at the La Crosse gage. Optimum conditions will also allow an initial reduction date of around June 15 with return to normal pool operating conditions beginning around September 15.

With all the approval in order we need some rain or snow. The ultimate decision about conducting a water level reduction will be dictated by the amount of moisture we have in the upper portion of the Mississippi River. River managers will be assessing conditions next April to determine if this is a good year for the demonstration. However, April assessments will only provide us with an indicator if conditions will be adequate, conditions can change dramatically in just a few months and we will need to be flexible about this decision.

No, it hasn't started yet!

During the final few weeks of fall, we experienced low flow conditions on the Upper Mississippi River. On November 16, 1999 the reading at the La Crosse gage was 4.8 (low control pool is 4.7). The past decade has produced above average precipitation so these low flow levels have not been experienced for a number of years. *The target gage reading during the water level reduction is 4.2 (0.5 feet below low control pool).*

Approval for Federal Funding is Granted

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Paul District has received approval to proceed with dredging under Section 1135 authority. The dredging will be done to mitigate for the effects the water level reduction may have on recreational or commercial boat traffic. This is a cost-share program requiring a non-Federal party to pay for 25% of the dredging and any related costs.

We have been working with interested non-Federal participants on this effort since last spring. If you are interested in learning more about this program, you can contact Gary Palesh, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in St. Paul at (651) 290-5282.

Monitoring to Evaluate

Federal and State resource management agencies have spent the summer conducting pre-water level reduction monitoring on Pool 8. Monitoring will continue during and for several years following the water level reduction. The monitoring is designed to measure the effects of the water level reduction on a wide variety of factors including water quality, sediment quality, plant production, light penetration, native mussels, recreational use, commercial transportation, and tributaries that flow into Pool 8. Comparing all of the data will allow for an evaluation of the effectiveness of the water level reduction.



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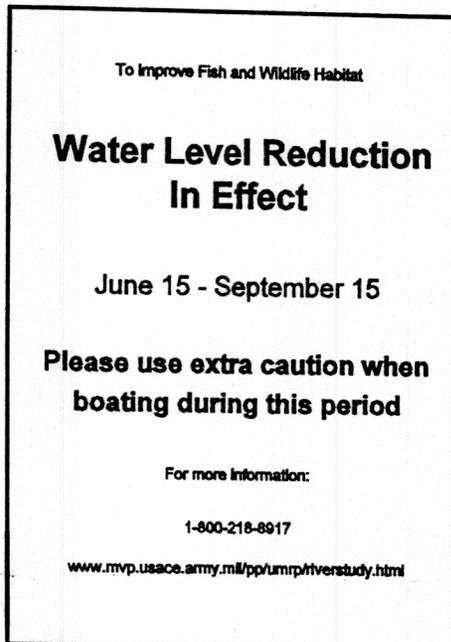
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Watch for the Signs

Informational signs will be placed at major boat landings, marinas and Lock & Dams 7 and 8 when the water level reduction begins on Pool 8. The signs will be white with green lettering and look like the one below.

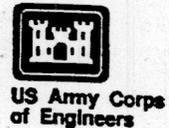


Year 2000 Public Meetings

Public meetings will be held in communities around Pool 8 during May/early June 2000 to update citizens on the status of the water level reduction. If the low water conditions continue throughout the winter, a reduction may not be possible. However, if the Mississippi River Basin receives a good snow pack and high river flows are achieved in the spring, the reduction should move forward. News releases will be issued and invitations will be sent to everyone on the mailing list when the dates for these meetings are determined.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns please contact one of the following people.

Gary Palesh
USACE - St. Paul District
190 Fifth Street East
St. Paul, MN 55101
651-290-5282



Gretchen Benjamin
WDNR
3550 Mormon Coulee Road
La Crosse, WI 54601
608-785-9982



Tim Schlagenhaft
MDNR
1801 South Oak Street
Lake City, MN 55041
651-345-3365



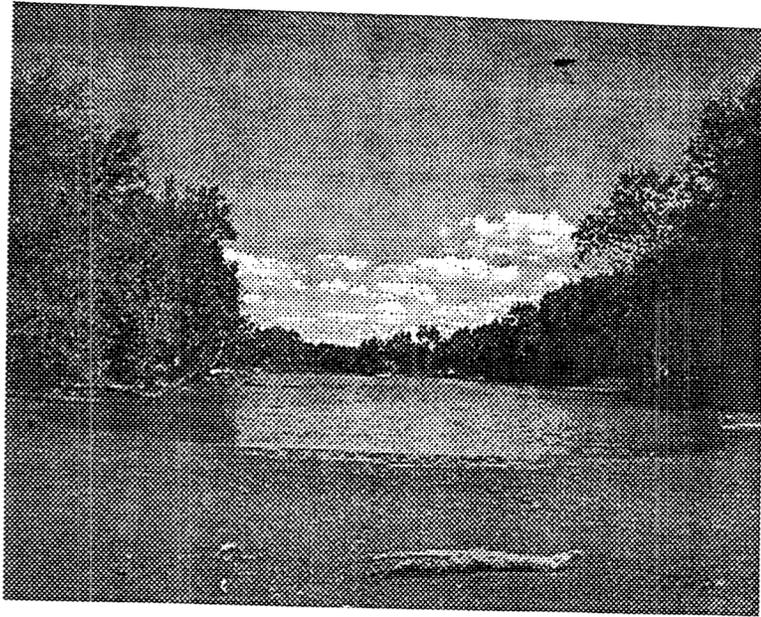
Keith Beseke
USFWS
51 East 4th Street
Winona, MN 55987
507-452-4232



Reminder

If you belong to a group or organization that would like to learn more about the water level reduction proposal, a speaker will come to your group and provide a presentation and answer questions. To schedule a speaker, please contact Gretchen Benjamin, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, (608) 785-9982.

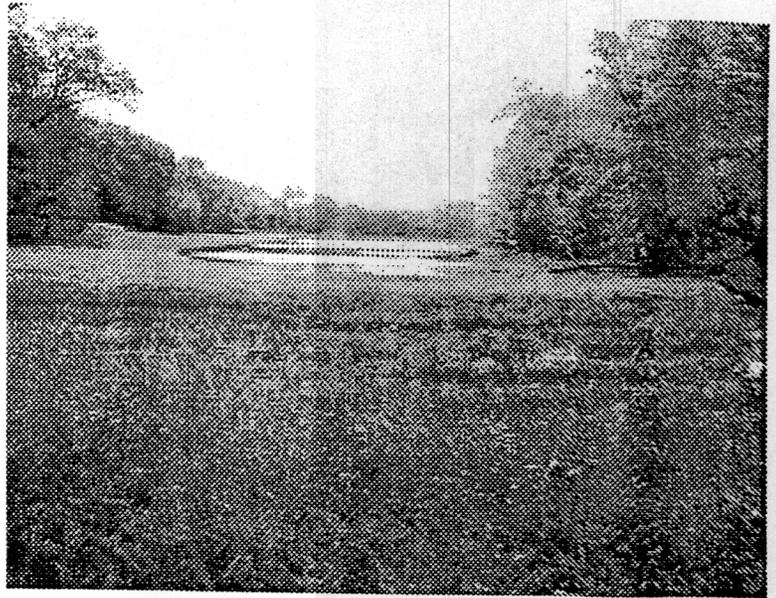




What Can a Water Level Reduction Do?

This series of photos is from Peck Lake, a small backwater lake near Blackhawk Park on Pool 9. A demonstration, small-scale, reduction was done on Peck Lake during the 1998 and 1999 growing seasons. The first photo dates from July 1998 and shows the absence of vegetation in the lake. Note the bare mud flat in the foreground and the log.

The second photo is from Peck Lake in October 1998. Despite the water level fluctuations in the lake throughout the summer, vegetation was able to re-establish and grow on the previously exposed mud flat. If you look carefully, you can still see the upper edges of the log near the middle left of the photo. The vegetation which grew on the mudflat included arrowhead, rice-cut grass and sedges.



This photo dates from **September 1999**. The same types of plants grew again but the beds were much more dense and robust. These are the types of results we hope to see in the backwater areas of lower Pool 8. Note that the log is completely covered.

If you would like to see these pictures in color, they will be available soon on the web page www.mvp.usace.army.mil/pp/umrp/riverstudy.html

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