

TVA Lakes at Highest level in Several Years

Due to recent and frequent rain, the Tennessee Valley Authority's lake levels are higher than they have been for several years. "People can anticipate full pools at the beginning of summer," said Chuck Bach, general manager of TVA's river scheduling and river operations. "The way we operate our river system, we pull it down to the lowest level in the wintertime, then in March and April we start filling it up and try to get everything up by June 1st for summer recreation. We try to hold them up for as long as we can, and then after Labor Day we start pulling them back down. That follows the hydrologic cycle for valley area, where you have large rain events in late winter and early spring. This year is a perfect example of those rain events. In Knoxville we're five inches above normal, so we have lots of room to store water in all our reservoirs. Because of that we didn't have any flooding. We were able to follow our guide curves up and get ready for the summer, and we've been able to run a little extra water through our hydrogenerators and generate some electricity."

Bach said on occasion too much water accumulates in a particular reservoir and must be released through the spillway. He noted that the long-term forecast is for warmer and drier weather, adding that TVA will do what is necessary to keep the lake levels up in the Tennessee Valley region. At full pool, Watauga Lake (above the dam) is 1,959 feet elevation, the highest lake in the TVA system, while the level below the dam is 1,650 feet. For comparison, Douglas Lake is just over 1,000 feet elevation and Chickamauga is less than 700 feet.

Bach also said the Tennessee River system helps support the operations on the Ohio River, alleviating flooding by holding water back at strategic times and then releasing it after the flood crest has passed. "The Army Corps of Engineers takes over the operation of Kentucky Reservoir and pushes water out in front of the crest," he explained. "Then as the crest goes by they cut back so they don't add to the crest. Then they start moving water again. That helps prevent flooding on the lower Ohio and the Mississippi."

Travis Brickey, TVA media relations officer, said TVA's transmission system was heavily impacted by the severe storms that came through the valley April 28. "At the height of the outages we had 850,000 customers without power. Currently we are in the neighborhood of 6,000 still left without power. Those are mainly in the northern Alabama area and near Chattanooga," said Brickey. "We had more than 300 of the big steel towers with the high voltage lines either damaged or destroyed. All of that has to be rebuilt. It's been a monumental task, and we will continue working to get power back on and provided to our customers, which are the local power companies. Outages will remain because of the local companies also having damages to their infrastructures. We'll continue beefing up our system through the weeks and months to come to get the grid back to what it was before this major storm. It's been a big challenge for us."

"We have 4,000 people working day and night to get power back on for everybody," said Bach.