

## **Struggling to stay afloat: Dam repairs imperil Lake Cumberland tourism business**

BURNSIDE, KY – Pam Stanley and Colleen Menth had to see for themselves how their summer playground had changed, so they took a day off from work one cold day earlier this month and drove 186 miles south from Greater Cincinnati to Lake Cumberland.

“Unbelievable,” said Stanley of Colerain Township as she looked down the hillside above Burnside Marina at the receding lake and pointed to a spot on the exposed, muddy lake bottom. Stranded on the lakebed that now stretches out 100 yards or more were the slips for some 40 boats. “That’s where we dock our boat”, she said. But not this summer and maybe not even for the next seven.

To relieve pressure on the leaking and dangerously weakened Wolf Creek Dam, which impounds the 63,000 acre lake, the U.S. Army Core of Engineers is releasing water and lowering the lake 40 feet below its normal summer level. The lake will be kept there while \$309 million in repairs are made to the concrete and earthen dam.

That, the Corps commander in Nashville determined, was the best way to handle the project for two reasons: first, less water to flood below the dam into the Cumberland River in the unlikely event of a breach or catastrophic failure, and secondly, less pressure and flow to interfere with plugging the leaks as tons of concrete grout are pumped into cavities under and around the earthen portion of the dam. The lowered lake, however, has left boat ramps, marina docks, swimming areas and hide-away coves high and dry. Some end 20 feet above the water’s surface.

It has also left the businesses and communities that surround the lake worried about the coming tourist season on which they depend. Lake Cumberland draws 5 million visitors each year. Tourism is the lifeblood of the counties around the lake; a \$150 million piece of the local economy. In the wake of the Corps decision to lower the lake to 680 feet above sea level – 10 feet below the 690-foot level that is the normal winter pool and 40 feet below the 723-foot summer pool level, tourism business and officials have been swamped with calls from anxious boaters, who’ve heard the news and want to know if the lake will still be a good place to vacation.

They’ve answered, not surprisingly, with a resounding yes. They point out that the lake won’t be a 63,000 acre lake, but at 35,000 acres it will still be the third largest lake in Kentucky and much larger than its nearby competitors Dale Hollow and Norris Lake in Tennessee.

“The important thing is we want the positive information out there that we have a very beautiful lake. It’s still the third largest lake in the state of Kentucky and 35,000 acres is a lot of water to play in. The lake is open. There are plenty of things to do,” said Carolyn Mounce, executive director of the Somerset Pulaski County Convention and Visitors Bureau.