

Corps of Engineers watches Lake Washington's water level--conservation underway



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SEATTLE--The Army Corps of Engineers has started conservation measures at the Chittenden Locks in Ballard based on watershed conditions and forecasts. The Corps has closed the saltwater drain and reduced flows for steelhead attraction, saving approximately six inches of water per month.

The Corps began raising Lake Washington from its winter level earlier than normal to capture as much spring rainfall and runoff as possible. The Corps regulates the level of Lake Washington with the Hiram M. Chittenden Locks and dam in Ballard.

Lower flows on the Cedar River and low precipitation and snow pack have reduced the amount of water available for filling Lake Washington. However, the Corps cannot predict at this time if there will be a problem raising the lake to its normal summer level of 22 feet above sea level (Corps of Engineers datum).

"Without a significant amount of rain this spring, water use at the Locks will be curtailed, affecting navigation, fish passage and control of salinity into the freshwater system," said Marian Valentine, senior water manager at the Corps' Seattle District.

By initiating refill and conservation measures early, the Corps expects to maximize the water available to provide flows through the smolt passage flumes for salmon. These flows allow for safe juvenile salmon migration to the ocean. Without the flow through the flumes, juvenile salmon would experience higher mortality during their migration through the Locks.

The Corps may find it necessary to consolidate lockings and undertake other measures later this year, if the dry weather continues. Consolidated lockings would also reduce the need to use water to reduce salinity intrusion. Boaters should be aware of water issues and should use the locks prudently.

Boaters and lake dwellers are encouraged to monitor Lake Washington's elevation any time on the Internet at <http://www.nws.usace.army.mil>, by clicking on the [Lake and river level information](#) link under "Links of Interest." The site provides current elevation information as well as a graph of Lake Washington's average elevation throughout the year. For information about conservation in the Seattle area click on: [saving water.org](#)