NEWS

GUADALUPE-BLANCO RIVER AUTHORITY
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Drought Conditions Require Reduction In Canyon Reservoir Release

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SEGUIN…… The Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority (GBRA) anticipates the release from Canyon Reservoir will be reduced to approximately 65 cubic feet per second (cfs) on Friday, June 23, due to drought conditions and lack of Reservoir inflow.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) operating permit issued to Canyon Dam and Reservoir defines drought as when the daily inflows to Canyon Reservoir average less than 90 cfs over a period of 45 days.

"We will reach the 90 cfs/45 day drought criteria on Thursday, June 22," said GBRA general manager Bill West. "At that point, the FERC permit requires GBRA to reduce releases to match the inflow into Canyon."

The FERC permit, as well as a separate permit issued by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEC), require natural inflows to be passed through the reservoir to meet senior downstream water rights and environmental needs. The announced release rate of 65 cfs will fulfill both these requirements and also help preserve Canyon Reservoir's stored water supply. This release rate will be adjusted as necessary to reflect changing inflows to Canyon Reservoir.

"Texas weather can change rapidly," said West, "and droughts are usually ended by heavy rainfall. Canyon Reservoir recharges quickly, so it is important for people to check local weather and current recreation conditions before coming to Canyon Reservoir."

Canyon Dam and Reservoir was built in 1964 as a flood control project by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, with GBRA serving as the local sponsor.

The upper portion, or 'flood pool,' between the elevation of 909-943 feet mean sea level (msl) is controlled by the Corps of Engineers. This portion of the reservoir is normally kept empty to capture flood waters and protect people and property downstream.

The lower level, or 'conservation pool' between 800-909 feet msl stores water that is released by GBRA to meet commitments to downstream water users during periods of drought or low river flow.

West also addressed the existing drought in Texas and the Guadalupe River basin, and compared the current situation to the historic drought of record during the 1950's.

Lack of rainfall and recharge have also contributed to the declining level of the Edwards Aquifer, a multi-county resource used by more than 2.2 million people.

The Aquifer measured 655.9 feet on June 20. A level of 650 msl triggers Stage I of the Edwards Aquifer Authority Demand Management/Critical Period drought restrictions for Aquifer users in Bexar, Medina, and parts of Atascosa, Comal, Guadalupe, Hays and Caldwell counties.

The drought has also affected flows from Comal and San Marcos Springs. On June 20, Comal spring flow measured 260 cubic feet per second (cfs) and the San Marcos spring flow was 113 cfs. When flows drop below 150 cfs at Comal and 100 at San Marcos, endangered species including Texas Wild Rice, the Fountain Darter and the San Marcos Gambusia are technically in 'jeopardy'.

"This is not just a 'protect the species' issue. It's a 'protect the resources' issue," said West. "People need to understand that spring flows are essential to the water supply in the Guadalupe and San Marcos Rivers. This water is used by cities, industries and agricultural producers all the way to the Texas Coast. It is also the basis for many water rights issued by the State of Texas."

Normally, rainfall and runoff supply most of the baseflow in the Guadalupe River System, with spring flows contributing around 20-30%. Today, the situation is almost reversed. On June 14, spring flows contributed 69% of the river flow at New Braunfels, 60% at Seguin, 77% at Gonzales, 63% at Cuero, and 76% at Victoria.

"This is why management of the Aquifer and protection of its resources is so important," said West. "We must all work together to ensure that everyone who depends upon the Aquifer will have enough water to meet their basic needs."