



News Release

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Water Management Monthly News Release

OMAHA – Despite recent snow and rain across much of the area, drought continues to plague the Missouri River basin, forcing reservoir levels to record lows.

“Storage in the reservoir system ended 2004 at an all time record low,” said Larry Cieslik, Chief of the Water Management office here. Runoff into the reservoir system was 16.6 million acre feet (MAF), just 66 percent of the long-term average. Normal runoff is 25.2 MAF. This was the fifth consecutive year of below normal runoff.

“We are attempting to mitigate the impacts of drought by implementing more stringent water conservation measures and by helping states and communities cope with the problems caused by low reservoir and river levels and low releases,” said Cieslik. Over the past several years the Corps has extended and relocated boat ramps, increased spraying of noxious weeds, and provided technical and emergency assistance to communities dealing with water intake problems.

Steady to rising reservoir levels were provided during the 2004 spring fish spawn in each of the upper three reservoirs. Navigation target flows were not met between Omaha and Sioux City last April and the season length was shortened 47 days. Fall releases from Gavins Point Dam were cut to historic low levels to help conserve water.

Again this year, minimum navigation targets may not be supported in April in reaches where there is no traffic. The navigation season length is anticipated to be shortened 33 to 61 days, depending on runoff this winter and spring. The final decision on season length will be based on

reservoir storage on July 1. Releases for protected terns and plovers will be adjusted during the nesting season to protect the birds and conserve water in the reservoirs. If drought conditions persist, the Corps will, to the extent possible, provide rising reservoir levels in Oahe during April and May and in Fort Peck during May and June.

Reservoir storage ended December at 35.2 MAF, down 500,000 acre feet during the month and 19.3 MAF below normal. Last year at this time it was 38.7 MAF.

As of Jan. 1, the mountain snowpack was 70 percent of normal in the reach above Fort Peck and 77 percent in the reach from Fort Peck to Garrison. “Even if we get normal precipitation, we expect to get well below normal runoff due to the dry soil conditions throughout the basin. Our runoff forecast for 2005 is 18.7 MAF of runoff, 74 percent of normal,” said Cieslik.

Hydropower for 2004 totaled 6.5 billion kilowatt hours (kWh) compared to a normal of 10 billion kWh. The six main stem powerplants generated 427 million kWh of electricity in December, the lowest December on record.

Gavins Point releases ranged from 10,500 cfs to 14,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) in December based on weather and river ice conditions. “Because of the low reservoir levels and continued drought, we are setting releases as low as possible this winter to meet drinking water and powerplant needs while conserving water in the reservoirs. We will continue to monitor weather and river conditions to assure adequate water supply along the river,” said Cieslik. Moderate temperatures could allow releases to be set lower than 12,000 cfs without causing water supply problems to municipal and powerplant intakes. Gavins Point releases averaged 16,100 and 13,700 cfs last January and February, respectively.

Gavins Point reservoir is currently near elevation 1206 feet above mean sea level (msl). It will gradually rise to elevation 1207.5 feet msl and be held near that level through January and February.

Fort Randall releases averaged 11,200 cfs in December. This month, they will range from 10,000 to 13,000 cfs as needed to maintain Gavins Point near its desired elevation. Fort Randall ended the month at 1341.8 feet msl. It will continue to refill, ending the month near elevation 1345 feet msl.

Oahe reservoir declined slightly during December, ending the month at elevation 1575.8 feet msl. It is expected to remain near that level during January, ending the month 26 feet below normal. The reservoir is 2 feet lower than last year at this time.

Garrison releases averaged 15,200 cfs during December and are expected to remain near that level in January. The Missouri River at Bismarck froze over in mid-December without incident. Flooding can be a concern during the freeze-in period because the river level rises rather dramatically over a short period of time. Garrison reservoir fell more than 2 feet in December ending the month at a record low elevation 1810 feet msl. It will drop two feet in January, ending 27 feet below normal. The reservoir is 8 feet lower than last year at this time.

Fort Peck releases averaged 5,500 cfs in December. They will remain between 5,500 and 6,000 in January and February to meet power production requirements. The reservoir fell less than one foot in December, ending the month at elevation 2198.9 feet msl. It will fall about a foot in January, ending the month 34 feet below normal. Last year at this time it was 8 feet higher.

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Daily and forecasted reservoir and river information is available on the Water Management section of the Northwestern Division homepage: www.nwd.usace.army.mil.

MISSOURI RIVER MAIN STEM RESERVOIR DATA

	Pool Elevation (ft msl)		Water in Storage - 1,000 acre-feet		
	On Dec 31	Change in Dec	On Dec 31	% of 1967-2003 Average	Change in Dec
Fort Peck	2198.9	-0.9	8,829	59	-132
Garrison	1810.0	-2.3	10,936	61	-486
Oahe	1575.8	-0.2	10,824	63	-42
Big Bend	1420.3	-0.7	1,701	98	-28
Fort Randall	1338.3	+3.5	2,549	96	+211
Gavins Point	1207.4	-0.2	395	94	-3
			35,234	65	-480

WATER RELEASES AND ENERGY GENERATION FOR NOVEMBER

	Average Release in 1,000 cfs	Releases in 1,000 af	Generation in 1,000 MWh
Fort Peck	5.5	339	48
Garrison	15.2	934	119
Oahe	13.9	854	107
Big Bend	13.3	818	51
Fort Randall	11.2	687	65
Gavins Point	12.4	759	37
			427