



News Release

Lake Tapps Dropping to Lowest Level Ever for Repairs to PSE Hydropower Facilities

BELLEVUE, Wash.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Jan. 24, 2003--By the end of this month Lake Tapps should reach its lowest water level in history as Puget Sound Energy draws down the 92-year-old Pierce County reservoir for needed inspections and repair of hydropower equipment.

The utility intends to drop the diked reservoir's water level by about 10 to 15 feet over the next week. Once the target is reached -- 505 feet above mean sea level -- Lake Tapps will post its lowest level ever, approximately 37 feet below the full, summertime water mark.

"If people around Lake Tapps have dock work that needs to be done before the start of boating season, it'll be the perfect time to tackle the job," said Charles Morton, PSE's manager of hydropower operations and maintenance. "All docks will be high and dry. We'll see lake bottom that hasn't been exposed since the project was first built."

During the first of two record-low drawdowns, PSE will inspect a small pipeline and valve that allow some Lake Tapps water to flow beneath a man-made dike into Bowman Creek, at the reservoir's northern edge. Workers also will inspect large, metal grates covering the entry to a 12-foot-wide pipeline that funnels Lake Tapps water into PSE's nearby White River Power Plant. The grates, to be replaced during the second reservoir drawdown, prevent logs and other debris from being pulled through the pipeline into the power plant's generator turbines.

PSE expects to complete the initial work during the first week of February. The utility then will raise the reservoir's water level back up to about 520 feet mean sea level, a typical wintertime level.

After the initial inspection work is done, Morton said, it will take four to five weeks to complete a repair plan and secure all the necessary replacement parts. At that point, roughly mid-March, the reservoir will be lowered again. Workers then will replace the underwater grates, or "trash racks," shielding the intake of the 2,840-foot-long pipeline that connects Lake Tapps to PSE's hydropower plant. PSE also will inspect the large concrete pipeline itself. In addition, the valve in the smaller, Bowman Creek pipeline will be replaced at that time.

Meanwhile, PSE expects to begin seismic upgrades to several of its dikes around Lake Tapps in early March. The seismic work, directed late last year by federal officials, is designed to safeguard the dikes against possible damage from a catastrophic earthquake.

Aided by new technology, researchers now believe earthquakes in the Pacific Northwest may reach greater magnitude than earlier thought. In response, government regulators are mandating seismic upgrades on hydroelectric facilities to increase their ability to withstand severe quakes.

PSE plans to build berms of rock and compacted earth along portions of its dikes' outer shoulders. The berms will be placed at locations deemed most susceptible to soil liquefaction from a shallow, high-intensity earthquake.

PSE hopes to finish most of the seismic-remediation dike work by early May so that Lake Tapps can be refilled to its recreational level by Memorial Day. The utility traditionally keeps the reservoir "full" -- at about 542 feet mean sea level -- from late May through early September.

The public may get periodic updates on the Lake Tapps dike-remediation project by calling PSE, toll-free, at 1-888/225-5773, option 5, extension 81-2400.

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