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Corps to Reduce Water Level in Lake Cumberland

NASHVILLE, TENN. (January 22, 2007) - The Commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Nashville District, today announced plans to lower the lake level at Wolf Creek Dam, in Russell County, Ky., effective immediately to 680 feet, in response to Corps and independent studies that have classified the dam as being at “high risk” for structural failure.

Normal pool levels are 723 feet in the summer and 690 feet in the winter. Dam safety experts will continually monitor conditions at Wolf Creek and further reductions may be necessary depending on the effect that lower lake levels have on the dam. Lowering the lake level will reduce the risk of dam failure by decreasing water pressure on the dam and reducing foundation seepage. These changes are in concert with ongoing rehabilitation plans at Wolf Creek that address the problem of seepage through the foundation of the dam.

“Public safety is our paramount concern,” said Lt. Col. Steven J. Roemhildt, Commander, Nashville District. “Since March 2005, we have modified the operation of Lake Cumberland to reduce high lake levels; we are now further lowering the lake levels to reduce risk. We understand that this decision will adversely impact many people, communities, and businesses that rely upon Lake Cumberland for project purposes and other uses, but we must take this emergency action to reduce risk to the public and to the dam itself.” The Nashville District will maintain the 680-foot elevation for the remainder of this year and will reevaluate lake levels in the Sept-Oct ‘07 time-frame for next year’s operation.

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Authorized project purposes for Wolf Creek Dam include Flood Control, Hydropower, Water Quality, and Recreation. The Nashville District is formulating a plan to mitigate effects to project purposes such as extension of boat ramps to allow additional access to the lake at this lower level.

Because of the seriousness of the foundation seepage problems at Wolf Creek Dam, the Army Corps of Engineers is taking these emergency measures to reduce the lake level and is initiating an accelerated grouting program.

“A high level of risk does exist,” said Roemhildt. “Reducing lake levels lowers pressure on the dam and pumping grout into the ground lessens erosion, both of which immediately reduce risk.” The Army Corps of Engineers has identified Wolf Creek Dam as one of the highest risk dams in the Corps Inventory.

The Corps will request full funding to accelerate construction of the remedial project. Nashville District has already awarded the first construction contract for the grouting program and grouting is underway.

The Army Corps of Engineers has an aggressive national Dam Safety Program that includes constant monitoring of all of the dams in the Cumberland River System. The Corps, in conjunction with state and local agencies, maintains emergency notification plans for each of its dams and these plans are used in the event of a dam failure. The Nashville District will continue to keep the public informed of the conditions at Wolf Creek Dam and the progress of rehabilitation work throughout the project with news releases and postings on this website:

<http://www.lrn.usace.army.mil/pao/issues/WOLcommo/>

The District will soon publish the time and location for a series of public meetings in nearby communities explaining the emergency measures, mitigation efforts, and dam safety. Additionally, the District will initiate alternative procedures to process an Environmental Impact Statement pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. Public and agency input will be solicited as part of these forums.