

Lake's level higher than last year

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson
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LAKE COUNTY – Despite what has felt like a hotter-than-average summer in Lake County, Clear Lake's levels are doing better than last year's.

At the end of the day Wednesday the US Geological Survey's gage height in feet placed Clear Lake's depth at 3.20 feet above Zero Rumsey, the lake's natural low water level, which is 1318.256 feet above mean sea level, according to the Lake County Department of Water Resources.

Wednesday's level for the 63-square-mile lake surpassed that of the same date last year, when it measured 2.78 feet above Rumsey. The 3.20 foot measurement Wednesday also is slightly above the lake's annual average height of about 3.00 feet above Rumsey, recorded between 1979 and 2006.

The Solano Decree, first handed down in 1978 and modified in 1995, determines how much water Yolo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District – which owns the water rights to Clear Lake – can take out of the lake based on water levels on May 1, Water Resources reported.

If the lake is full – or 7.56 feet Rumsey – on May 1 Yolo Flood can take its full allotment, according to Water Resources. If the lake is below 3.22 feet Rumsey, no water can be taken.

Water Resources reported that on May 1 the lake was at 6.67 feet Rumsey, following 8,352 acre feet of water being removed from the lake in April, which reduced the lake's level by 0.09 feet Rumsey.

The slightly better water levels this year meant that Yolo Flood was able to take 119,960 acre feet – 80 percent of their annual allocation – out of the lake for irrigation this year, Water Resources reported.

An acre foot of water is 326,000 gallons – the amount of water it takes to cover an acre of land with one foot of water, according to Water Resources.

That means that, this year, Yolo Flood took more than 39 billion gallons of water from Clear Lake. Had the lake been full, they could have taken an allocation of nearly 49 billion gallons.

In 2007, the May 1 measurement was 5.82 feet Rumsey, which meant Yolo Flood only received a 57-percent allocation, which was just over 85,000 acre feet – or nearly 28 billion gallons of water, as Lake County News has reported.

Due to surface evaporation, Clear Lake's levels can drop anywhere from 3 to 6.5 feet in a summer, according to Water Resources.

Lake levels had started off very strong earlier this year thanks to early season rains and runoff from snow in the mountains, with Clear Lake hitting its fullest point – 7.11 feet Rumsey – on March 21, as opposed to its highest level for 2007, 6.13 feet Rumsey.

The area's creeks are running at below average, according to the US Geological Survey. While Kelsey Creek and Cache Creek at Lower Lake show lower-than-normal gage heights and less water discharge, both Putah Creek near Guenoc and Cache Creek near Hough Springs recorded zero discharge.

Although the lake's depth isn't record-breaking, it's in a better position than some other lakes and reservoirs in Northern California.

Indian Valley Reservoir, also owned by Yolo Flood in Lake County, had 37,296 acre feet of storage on Wednesday, down more than 69,000 acre feet from this time last year, according to Yolo Flood measurements.

Late last month, the state Department of Water Resources reported that levels were dropping in Lake Oroville to the point where the agency was going to have to use extensions for the lake's boat launch ramps, which were on dry ground.

That lake is at 49 percent of average for this time of year and is only 62 feet above its historical low point, reached in September of 1977, the state Department of Water Resources reported.

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