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Pepacton Reservoir - New York City Water Supply System


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CONTACT: Ian Michaels (DEP) 718-595-6600

Maureen Wren (DEC) 518-402-8000

Snow Pack-Based Spill Reduction Program Expanded to the Neversink Reservoir

Pepacton and Neversink Now Protected as DEC and DEP Work to Prevent Flooding

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner Denise M. Sheehan and New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Emily Lloyd announced today that the spill reduction program which has been in place at the City's Pepacton Reservoir has been expanded this year to include the Neversink Reservoir in Sullivan County.

"Following the success of the spill reduction program at Pepacton, the City and State jointly advocated for its expansion to Neversink," Commissioner Sheehan said. "This will help protect the people and properties in flood-prone areas during the winter and spring months when snow causes water levels to rise sharply. Through work with DEP, local municipalities, and the federal government, we have been able to create a unique controlled release program that will alleviate the pressure of snowfall and melt. This will help protect the residences while also ensuring that water supply remains at desired levels to serve the millions of New Yorkers that rely on this important resource."

Commissioner Lloyd said, "This agreement balances the interests of areas immediately downstream, the concerns of the nine million people who depend on these reservoirs as a critical part of their drinking water supply, and the millions of people in other states who rely on the Delaware River for drinking water, transportation and commerce. This will help absorb much of the anticipated spring run-off, but residents must remember that while controlled releases will help decrease the risk, communities downstream should still take steps to improve their flood preparedness and to closely examine their uses of the downstream flood plain."

Under the program, controlled releases will be made from Pepacton and Neversink in order to maintain voids in the reservoirs equal to one-half of the water equivalent of any existing snow pack surrounding the reservoirs, meaning that the void will vary as the snow pack increases or decreases. The program will continue until March 31.

MORE INFORMATION

NYC Department of Environmental Protection
 Communications & Intergovernmental Affairs

59-17 Junction Boulevard
 19th Floor
 Flushing, NY 11373

(718) 595 - 6600

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The snow pack program was first implemented at the Pepacton Reservoir last winter after a smaller program, which created a five billion gallon void in the reservoir, proved to be successful the year before. The snow pack program at Pepacton was the result of an agreement reached after months of discussion by a committee seeking ways to help alleviate flooding concerns along the East Branch of the Delaware River. Members of the committee included DEP, DEC, Delaware County, the Town of Colchester, and the federal government.

The City and State sought to expand the program to the Neversink Reservoir for the following winter and were able to secure the approval of all the parties to the 1955 Supreme Court consent decree, which governs the use of the Delaware River's headwaters. The approval of all four Delaware River basin states (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware) is required for any controlled releases from the City's Delaware River reservoirs.

Releases from Pepacton will not be made when the river stage at Fishs Eddy is above 11 feet, or is projected to be above 11 feet within 48 hours. Releases may also be suspended if ice threatens flood-prone areas. The flood stage for the East Branch of the Delaware River is 13 feet as measured by the gauging station at Fishs Eddy.

Flood stage for the Neversink River at Bridgeville is 8 feet. Accordingly, releases will not be made when the measurement at Bridgeville is above 6 feet or is forecast to be above 6 feet within 48 hours. These guidelines are subject to modification based on information that may become available demonstrating the necessity of a lower cautionary stage.

The Pepacton Reservoir is the largest of the four reservoirs that make up New York City's Delaware Water System, which provides about 50 percent of the City's daily supply of about 1.2 billion gallons. It was put into service in 1955 and has a capacity of 143.7 billion gallons. As of the morning of January 4, Pepacton was filled to 91.3 percent of capacity.

The Neversink Reservoir is another component of the Delaware Water System and was put into service in 1954. It has a capacity of 34.9 billion gallons and as of January 4 was filled to 95.1 percent of capacity. Normal storage for the City's entire water supply system on January 4 would be 78.2 percent.

"Normal reservoir levels are based on averages from previous years," said Commissioner Lloyd. "Some years are higher and some years will of course be lower. That is why the system has experienced six droughts since 1980. Above average water levels are an important hedge against the possibility of future droughts, which are impossible to predict."

Releases and river levels are directed by Delaware River Master according to the Supreme Court consent decree. Releases can also be dictated by the DEC in accordance with the DRBC experimental fisheries program. The DEP cannot take unilateral action to increase or decrease the downstream releases from the City's Delaware River reservoirs.

Snow pack estimates are issued daily by the National Weather Service. The DEP also takes snow pack measurements and with the assistance of DEC is in the process of upgrading its system for more accurate results.