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From staff reports

## Corps to release more water from Lake Lanier

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will release additional water down the Chattahoochee River, as a rainy winter has raised Lake Lanier to its highest level since August 2007.

Lanier was at a level of 1,063.59 feet above sea level as of 7:15 p.m., according to the U.S. Geological Survey's Web site. That puts Lanier about 7.5 feet below full pool of 1,071 feet.

The frequent rains the area has received during the past two months have raised Lanier nearly 7 feet since Feb. 22 and more than 10 feet since Jan. 1. In early December, Lanier came perilously close to breaking its all-time record low of 1,050.79 feet above sea level.

Gainesville has received above-normal rainfall so far this year, according to AccuWeather Inc.

Though normal annual rainfall through April 22 is 20.36 inches, Gainesville got 21.23 inches in that time period. April has been wetter than normal, too, with 4.85 inches recorded through Wednesday. The normal monthly rainfall through April 22 is 3.17 inches.

Last month, Georgia's Environmental Protection Division eased water restrictions as drought conditions lessened. The EPD instituted an outdoor watering ban in fall 2007. Lanier's level at that time was about what it is now and drought conditions gripped much of the state.

Since December, the severity of the drought in the Lake Lanier basin has improved from "exceptional," the worst category, to "moderate." The lowest category of drought is "abnormally dry," and state Climatologist David Stooksbury said at the end of March that several more weeks of rain could improve the Lanier basin to that level. The Lanier basin remained in the "moderate" drought range as of Tuesday, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

The National Weather Service's three-month drought forecast predicts further easing of drought conditions in Northeast Georgia through July.

Though rainfall has resulted in an easing of the outdoor watering ban, restrictions remain in place.

"We're happy it's raining, don't misunderstand," said Kevin Chambers, spokesman for the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, said in late March. "But we need four consecutive months of improvement to convene the state drought response committee (to consider changing the rules)."

According to the corps' boat ramp elevation calculator, 1,068 is the point at which all existing boat ramps on Lanier are usable; most are accessible at 1,065.

The lake supplies much of the Atlanta area's drinking water.

Florida and Alabama opposed the corps' decision last year to reduce releases from November through April 30.

EPD Director Carol Couch, who previously requested the reduced releases, did not make such a request this time. She said sending less water down the river in May as the weather gets warmer could harm the trout population.

*The Associated Press contributed to this story.*

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