

Corps puts brakes on Lake

By Keith Kinnaird
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Lakes and rivers commission wants to preserve access

Sandpoint—The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has agreed to put the brakes on a drawdown of Lake Pend Oreille following a request from Idaho's lakes and rivers commission.

The commission made the request so lake users can have access to docks and launches through the end of the month.

The Corps announced earlier this month it planned to lower Lake Pend Oreille's level by as much as 2 ½ feet by the end of September, which would have made it difficult to access shallow areas of the lake. The announcement prompted the commission to ask the Corps not to lower the lake by more than 1.2 feet.

"With a foot (of water let out of the lake) people can still obviously continue to use the lake," said Ford Elsaesser, chairman of the Pend Oreille/Priest lakes and rivers commission.

On Monday the Corps agreed to honor the commission's request. As of Thursday, the lake's level was at 2,062.13 feet above sea level.

"That is a positive indication that the Lakes Commission is, for lack of a better word, a 'player' in the water issues," said Elsaesser.

The Corps still plans to hold the lake's winter pool 4 feet higher than last year's level in order aid Pend Oreille's flagging kokanee fishery, putting the winter pool at about 2,055 by the end of November.

Elsaesser was unsure why the Corps initially planned an accelerated drawdown and it was not clear why the commission was not consulted when this fall's drawdown schedule was being devised. Elsaesser said water managers have agreed to a slower drawdown in the past.

Elsaesser hopes water managers will one day hold the lake at full pool until October as a general rule, so landowners and lake visitors can count on using the lake from July through September.

"Right now we feel the Corps is being very responsive to the needs of the Commission, so we think we've got a good relationship, and we're just going to keep working on it," he said.