

Contributed

Operation Support Manager Ben Heath with the interactive map at the TVA's River Forecast Center in downtown Knoxville — where the agency controls its dam system.



BEN OVERBY | The Sun

Kentucky Lake will reach normal summer elevation levels despite drought conditions according to the Tennessee Valley Authority. The agency worked proactively to raise the reservoir early.

TVA keeps Kentucky Lake at summer levels during drought

Agency says early action helped maintain reservoir levels

BY BEN OVERBY | THE SUN
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The Tennessee Valley Authority has worked proactively throughout the beginning of the year to maintain its reservoirs — including Kentucky Lake — despite drought conditions.

Ben Heath — operations support manager for the TVA's River Forecast Center — said they are seeing only 70% or normal rainfall and 40% of normal runoff into reservoirs in the Tennessee Valley. He said while many TVA reservoirs will not reach normal summer levels, they were able to take action to make sure that Kentucky Lake does.

“Fortunately, this year, we were very proactive because we saw the drought coming and started to raise the reservoir early, so the Kentucky reservoir is up to summer elevations, fortunately,” Heath said. “Many of our reservoirs on the eastern side of the Tennessee Valley, close to the North Carolina area, are not reaching summer elevations, just because they're not getting the rainfall and

runoff that's necessary. But there's good news for Kentucky that, even though this area is experiencing a pretty severe drought, that the reservoir is full and ready to go for the summer.”

Heath said operating policy for the TVA is typically to start filling reservoirs around March, but they began collecting rainfall and runoff earlier in the year to compensate for drought conditions. He said the TVA fulfills multiple objectives by maintaining its reservoirs, including supporting navigation and commercial traffic, hydro-power and water quality. Heath said two major objectives for Kentucky Lake are recreation and maintaining a healthy habitat, which largely means maintaining an ample environmental flow to keep fish healthy.

“Recreation looks a little different for different people,” Heath said. “Some people just want a full reservoir to go out and use their boat, but then there's also fishing. There's many different avenues that people use for recreation. We balance those objectives every single day. When

you have a drought, it can look a little bit different, but we're still having to meet those objectives. It really is a balance every single day, and that balance varies from season to season, so that's the reason we operate our reservoirs like we do.”

Heath encouraged those heading out to the lake for the summer to enjoy the reservoirs, but keep safety in mind, especially around dams like Kentucky Dam. He said many people don't understand how large reservoirs like Kentucky Lake are or how much water flows through Kentucky Dam regularly, between 100 and 300 gallons per second.

He encouraged people to download the TVA Lake Info app to see real-time information about elevation and flows in the waterways that is updated hourly.

“The lakes look normal,” Heath said. “They're up to summer elevations, but what might look a little different is going to be the flows through Kentucky reservoir, because with less water, less rainfall, less runoff, you're going to have a little bit less flow. Those flows can be seen on the website or app.”



SETH TUPPER | South Dakota Searchlight

“I voted” stickers rest on a counter. Kentucky's primary election is May 19 but early voting is May 14-16.

Early voting for Kentucky primary elections begins Thursday

BY MCKENNA HORSLEY
KENTUCKY LANTERN

Kentucky voters can start voting early Thursday morning across the state.

Formally called “no-excuse in-person absentee voting,” registered voters have Thursday, Friday and Saturday to vote ahead of the primary Election Day, which is Tuesday. It differs from absentee voting, where voters can cast ballots in-person or by mail if they have an excuse recognized under state law.

Early voting polling locations and hours vary by county. To find local information,

visit the State Board of Elections website. Also listed are Election Day polling locations and drop box locations for returning mail absentee ballots.

The deadline to request an absentee ballot has passed, but they must be returned to a voter's local county clerk's office by the time polls close Tuesday, which is 6 p.m. local time.

Voters have several races to decide, including Democratic and Republican nominees for U.S. Senate and the U.S. House. Independent voters may also cast ballots in some

local races. To view a sample ballot, visit the Secretary of State's website.

About 17,000 of the roughly 32,000 requested mail-in absentee ballots — or 54.12% — had been returned to county clerk's offices as of Tuesday, the State Board of Elections' turnout data said. For in-person excused voting, nearly 5,000 Kentuckians participated.

This article was originally published by the Kentucky Lantern, a nonprofit news site covering state government and politics, at kentuckylantern.com.

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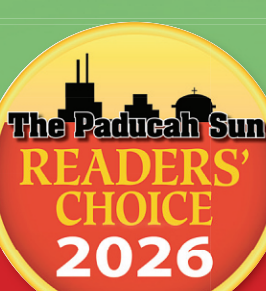


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