



MAY 3, 2019

Low Ross Lake Levels Projected for 2019 Summer Recreation Season

OVERVIEW

Seattle City Light is predicting that water levels in Ross reservoir will be significantly lower than normal during the summer months of 2019. The typical pool elevation in July and August is between 1600 and 1602.5 feet. As of May 3, the Ross Lake levels are estimated as follows:

June 30: 1567-1578 feet

July 31: 1579-1587 feet

August 31: 1584-1591 feet

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

- March 2019 was the driest March in the Skagit basin since the record was set in 1992. February 2019 was also very dry. The Skagit received only 4.4 inches of precipitation during these two months while the 30-year average is 15.56 inches.
- Snow pack in the Skagit basin declined by 18% in March and was only 75% of normal (1992-2019) as of April 15.
- Because of dry conditions in March, tributary inflows to the Skagit River between Newhalem and Rockport were far below normal. To protect Chum salmon redds in this area, City Light needed to release about 900 cubic feet per second (cfs) more water than normal to the river downstream of Gorge Powerhouse throughout the month and into April.
- The additional water needed to supplement flow in the Skagit River is coming from Ross reservoir. This is because there is not enough storage in Diablo and Gorge reservoirs for discharge. Higher than normal releases to the river will continue until June 7 or until tributary inflow increases.

WHY DOES SEATTLE CITY LIGHT PRIORITIZE FLOW TO PROTECT FISH INSTEAD OF FILLING ROSS LAKE DURING THE SUMMER?

The federal license for the Skagit River Hydroelectric Project requires that City Light strive to protect 100% of salmon redds in the river between Gorge Powerhouse and Rockport. Chum salmon populations have been depressed in rivers in north Puget Sound and sustaining even a few redds is important to the conservation of this species.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR RECREATION ON ROSS LAKE IN THE SUMMER?

- Please see https://www.nps.gov/noca/planyourvisit/upload/rosslake_6-08.pdf and <https://www.nps.gov/noca/planyourvisit/boating-on-ross-lake.htm> for dock/ramp locations and the minimum lake level required for use. Of note:
 - None of the boat ramps and docks on the reservoir are usable at elevations below 1582.
 - The only usable site at elevation 1582 feet is Little Beaver dock.
 - At elevation 1586 feet and above Cat Island dock and the main boat launch at Hozomeen (Picnic Point) would be usable.
- While trails along Ross Lake will be usable, there could be up to several hundred feet of exposed rock, dirt, and wood between the water and the normal shoreline at full pool. The extent of exposed lakebed in any given location is dependent on topography.
- The risk of encountering submerged trees and logs will increase for boaters.
- Ross Lake Resort plans to continue normal operations for the summer. Any impacts to operations due to low water levels will be noted on the Ross Lake Resort website. Customers can also contact the resort at (206) 486-3751.

HOW OFTEN ARE ROSS LAKE LEVELS THIS LOW?

About once every 20 years. The last time Ross Lake was significantly lower than normal was in 2001. Reservoir levels in August 2015 were about 5 to 10 feet below normal because of drought conditions. The difference this year is the additional water released from the reservoir in the spring to protect Chum salmon redds in the river downstream of the Skagit Project.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR RECREATION ON DIABLO AND GORGE LAKES?

Water levels at Diablo and Gorge lakes will be normal. There should be no impacts on docks or ramps at either of these two reservoirs. Skagit Tours will operate as scheduled.