

Information Only

Hello, this is an automated message to provide the latest Buffalo Lake levels and gate settings. If you email his mailbox and DO NOT receive an auto reply, it means that no changes have been made since your last email.

On 04/15/2025, the gage read 7.79' adjustments were made to gate #4 closed by 15". Gate #2 is all the way open (top draw). Gate #3 is open 42" and gate #4 is closed.

As a reminder here are the order levels for the gage at different times of the year.

- The gage reading from October 1 – May 20th is 7.5' - 8.0'. attempting to maintain 8.0'.
- The gage reading from May 20th – October 1 is 8.0' - 8.5'. attempting to maintain 8.5'.

If you are contacting DNR regarding a developing dam emergency, please refer to your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) for procedures and call 911. Alternatively, you can call the State Emergency Warning Center at 800-943-0003, press 1, and ask for the DNR Duty Officer.

Some Frequently Asked Questions are provided below:

Q: Why is there a level order for Buffalo Lake? Why can't the lake be higher than the maximum?

A: As a result of numerous complaints about levels in Buffalo Lake in the early to mid 1970s, the Department of Natural Resources held a public hearing in 1976. The outcome was a level order which established a summer maximum and minimum elevation and a non-summer maximum elevation. These levels are read from the staff gage on the dam. The summer range is 8.0 (min) to 8.5 (max) and the winter max is 8.0 (no minimum) as read from this gage. The upper limit of the lake level outside of the summer season was established for the stated reason of protecting farmed lands during planting and harvesting times. The upper limit of the lake level inside of the summer season was to provide for better navigation but also to protect properties near the

upstream end of Buffalo Lake from high water. Exceeding the maximum elevation in the range increases the vulnerability of these lands to flooding.

Q: What elevation does the DNR target when managing levels?

A: The DNR has a goal of maintaining the level of Buffalo Lake at the upper end of the seasonal range without exceeding the maximum. The target levels, as referenced to the staff gage on the lock channel wall upstream of the gates are 8.0' during the non-summer season (October 1 – May 20) and 8.5' during the summer season (May 20 – October 1).

Q: How often are the gates adjusted?

A: The levels are checked approximately once per week by DNR Parks staff, and if the level is out of the level order range and/or different from the target level, a gate adjustment is made. This adjustment made based on a flow calculation at the dam and considers and is intended to bring the level to the target elevation within a reasonable period of time.

Q: Will the fish stocked in the lake be pulled through the dam, destroying the fishery in Buffalo Lake?

A: Fish can occasionally be entrained and moved downstream because they are unable to escape the draft of the dam. However, this only affects fish very near to the dam and does not affect the fish in the lake as a whole. Fish also have certain periods of time, based on species, when they move around and tend to migrate upstream and downstream; the 'fish ladder' in the main part of the dam helps facilitate this movement. In general, the ability for fish to pass both ways through the dam improves the fishery as a whole since it gives fish access to a wide variety of habitats.

Q: Why does the lake level sometimes read lower than the target?

A: Given that the gates are adjusted approximately once per week, and the fact that river flows vary daily, a steady, dead-on lake elevation is difficult to keep. During times of normal to below-normal rainfall, the level is more easily managed. During times of heavy rainfall or significant snowmelt, the flow changes significantly each day and the level may change significantly

Q: Can the level order be changed?

A: Legal level orders can be changed through a petition process and subsequent review and decision processes conducted by DNR Bureau of Waterways staff. Since modifying levels on water bodies involve the potential for positive and negative impacts to multiple components of the environment and properties, the process can take a significant amount of time and usually includes environmental studies and hydrologic/hydraulic analyses. At present, there is a petition from the Buffalo Lake Association proposing to lengthen the summer level timeframe which is being reviewed by DNR; studies by consulting firms are currently being conducted as part of the information-gathering process prior to final analysis and decision.

Q: The walls of the lock channel at the dam appear to be in poor condition. Is this a danger? Will they be fixed?

A: The lock channel walls are settling at a slow rate due to weak foundation conditions, which gives them a “sagging” appearance. The footbridge over the channel has been closed due to the same weak foundation concerns. There is no imminent danger to the public other than the footbridge and tripping/fall hazards from uneven surfaces. The walls are being monitored by engineers in DNR Land & Facilities and DNR Dam Safety for signs of more rapid settling and/or active lateral soil pressure, and rapid response procedures have been put in place in the case that the location becomes unstable. There is a project being developed that will repair the lock channels, with construction currently expected to happen in 2026.