
INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations

Lake Cowichan water management amended

LAKE COWICHAN – Amendments to the rule curve governing water management in the Cowichan Lake announced today will allow the release of water stored in the lake to start later in July, resulting in improved flows in Cowichan River during mid to late summer and fall.

The Water Act Order of Approval issued today is the result of a consultative approach with the Cowichan Valley Regional District and Catalyst Paper, the existing water licence holder, and follows a public meeting held in Lake Cowichan on March 9, 2013.

The previous water management regime (known as a “rule curve”) called for the lowering (or drawdown) of the lake level from full storage to start no later than July 9 each year. The new rule curve allows for this to be delayed until July 31 each year when natural conditions permit.

The delayed start of the drawdown will give the licence holder more flexibility on water releases. Catalyst Paper will be able to respond more effectively to conditions that may vary from year to year, and still meet the minimum outflow specified in their two water licences in most years. It will also help improve instream flow conditions during the fall migration and spawning of Chinook salmon.

The change is consistent within the existing water storage licences, which permit a maximum storage in the lake of 61.3 million cubic metres per year (or just under one metre of depth across the lake). It is also consistent with the requirement in Catalyst’s water licences to maintain a seven cubic metres per second base flow released into Cowichan River downstream of the lake during the April to November control period.

The order does not increase the maximum amount of storage on the lake or permit increasing the height of the storage structure, but provides greater flexibility to how the current stored water is managed during the summer to have a positive impact on water flows later in the season. To allow for additional storage would require an application to the province for additional storage rights beyond the existing water licences.

Under the Water Act, the comptroller of water rights considered a formal request received from the Cowichan Valley Regional District to change the operating guidelines for the management of water specified in the water licence held by Catalyst. The Comptroller of Water Rights received the request from the Cowichan Valley Regional District in December, 2012. A public information meeting was held, and consultation with Catalyst Paper and other stakeholders occurred before a decision was made to issue the order to amend the rule curve.

Learn More:

To read the full order to adjust the rule curve, visit:

http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wsd/cabinet/Catalyst_Order_May_30.pdf

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