



**TaxACT**

**Want to save money on your taxes?**

taxact.com : Start your **FREE Tax Return**

Change Printer Text Size: [Small](#) | [Medium](#) | [Large](#)

February 17, 2006  
From The Morning Call

## Walter Dam presents aggressive water release plan Officials hope higher flow on Lehigh River will boost business.

By Sarah Fulton  
Special to The Morning Call

Managers of the Francis E. Walter Dam in Kidder Township are striving to deepen the reservoir and carry out an aggressive water release plan to enhance the ecology and recreation of the Lehigh River.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, managers of the dam, held a public meeting at Split Rock Resort in Lake Harmony on Thursday to announce this year's plan for water releases.

The plan is similar to the initial plan presented last year in that the Corps plans to release water on 22 days from May to October to increase the flow of the Lehigh River and in turn, improve fish habitats vital to fishing along the river and boating activities that fuel area economies.

However, this year's plan calls for increasing the overall depth of the Francis E. Walter reservoir to 1,365 feet. In 2005, the Corps increased the depth to 1,330 feet. The reservoir has an average depth of 1,300 feet. The plan would increase the volume of the reservoir to 5.3 billion gallons of water above normal.

Storing more water in the reservoir allows for cooler deep-water temperatures and better spawning opportunities for fish, such as trout. Improving fish populations naturally allows for better fishing.

On the scheduled release weekends, the Corps plans to release 750 to 1,000 cubic feet of water per second into the Lehigh. At a minimum, the Corps will release 250 cubic feet per second. Rafters and other adventurous boaters await the releases and flock to the river for a chance to ride whitewater.

Corps spokesman Merv Brokke said the agency would plan ahead this year and coordinate releases for better recreational impact. If a release is scheduled during a dry period, the Corps will adjust the release so more water is let into the river on Saturday, the busiest river recreation day, rather than Sunday when many weekend rafter, kayakers and boaters return home.

In 2005, Carbon County tourism officials expected the area to gain an additional \$34 million in business because of increased water releases. One of the most popular boating areas, the Lehigh Gorge, a state scenic river, is located in the county.

"We want more, we want better, we want higher," said Jane Palli, president of the Lehigh Valley Canoe Club. "It's an economic issue for the area as well as a pleasure issue."

Jerry McAward of Northeast PA Kayak School said the increased flow of the river is not only good for recreation but the added depth will improve the quality of the water.

The plan for more releases didn't pan out in 2005 when a drought consumed most of the good rafting weekends of the summer. Ten of the 12 releases planned from May through July were carried out and none of the 10 releases scheduled for August through October were carried out.

"Mother Nature did not cooperate with the 2005 flow management plan," said Chris Kocher of Wildlands Conservancy, one of the agencies involved in planning the releases. "We have made progress on this issue and by working together in partnership we will meet our goal of protecting and enhancing our beloved Lehigh."

The Corps, Wildlands Conservancy, Delaware River Basin Commission, PA Fish and Boat Commission, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and department of Environmental Protection worked together to form the plan.

Releases for this year are scheduled for May 13-14, 27-28; June 10-11, 24-25; July 8-9, 22-23; August 5-6, 19-20; September 2-3, 16-17, 30; and October 1.

Sarah Fulton is a freelance writer.

Copyright © 2006, [The Morning Call](#)

» **Right to your doorstep!** - [Click here to subscribe to The Morning Call](#)  
» **Purchase full page reprints from today's edition and more**

» [Get news on your cell at www.mcall.com](#) [More info](#)