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From The Morning Call

Whitewater release on Lehigh canceled

Lack of rain has Carbon County dam too low for discharge.

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Continued dry conditions have prompted the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to cancel this weekend's scheduled water release from Francis E. Walter Dam into the Lehigh River, the fourth in a row scratched by lack of rain.

And the rest of the season could be a washout "unless there is significant rainfall" that raises the reservoir water level by the next and last scheduled release, set for Oct. 1-2, the Corps said.

The Corps manages the dam, near White Haven. It joined with the state Fish and Boat Commission and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to develop a management plan for the dam to augment downstream flows.

Fifteen more releases were planned this summer to pump \$34 million into the local economy after a new connector road opened in July, letting the dam fill to a higher level and allowing for three times as many water releases — 22 in all.

The extra releases, announced in April, were designed to spur business and enhance fisheries. Water from the dam boosts flow in the Lehigh River, drawing hundreds of people to ride rubber rafts over the churning whitewater.

But because rainfall is "significantly lower than the historic average, the 35 feet of water originally stored to achieve the recreation objectives of the 2005 plan has been fully depleted, and the reservoir is currently at its normal pool level," the Army Corps of Engineers said.

As of Tuesday, there had been no measurable rainfall in September for the area, according to the National Weather Service. Normal rainfall for the first half of September is about 2 inches. August rainfall also was well below average.

"Until such a time that the inflow to the reservoir increases significantly, the outflow will match the inflow, in which case no water can be stored," the Corps said.

The Army Corps of Engineers asked for public comment of the flow management plan at its Web site at <http://www.nap.usace.army.mil/Projects/FEWalter/index.htm>.

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