

## Low Riffe Lake Elevation/Boat Launch Access Update

**April 2023**

The Riffe Lake boat launches are unavailable due to an ongoing extreme lack of precipitation, which began in 2022. Following a dry October and November, much of the precipitation we have received has been in the form of snow. That snowpack won't help refill Riffe Lake until the temperatures warm up enough for it to melt. This lack of available water means very low inflows into Riffe Lake.

- Last year, our region experienced its driest 120-day stretch ever from roughly mid-June to Oct. 19.
- We experienced the driest November since 1976.
- January precipitation was 49% of average.
- February precipitation was 78% of average.
- March precipitation was 79% of average.
- Inflows between Oct. 1 and Feb. 28 were 63% of average.
- Inflows in March were 46% of average; they were the lowest March inflows on record.
- Snowpack levels are above normal.

As a steward of this resource, we must balance multiple factors:

- Public safety is a top priority for Tacoma Power, so we reduced the maximum lake level from 778.5 to 749 feet in 2017 due to updated seismic loading concerns on the Mossyrock Dam spillway piers (not to the dam itself).
- We draw Riffe Lake down to 745 feet every winter to ensure there is room to absorb large storms; this helps protect public safety by limiting any potential flooding impacts to the downstream Cowlitz River communities.
- In addition to recreational opportunity, we must also balance predetermined downstream flows for fish, plus power production and grid reliability, regardless of the amount of water flowing into the reservoir. However, we worked with our regulators to temporarily reduce our downstream flows; we plan to start this in mid-April.
- When our region experiences extreme cold (or heat), we are required to help meet the higher demand for energy.
- We constantly monitor weather, including inflow forecasts, precipitation, and snowpack levels, all of which are becoming harder to predict with climate change.

As of April 11, Riffe Lake is at approximately 674.04 feet of elevation. We can safely reopen the longer lane at the Mossyrock Park boat launch when Riffe Lake reaches approximately 708 feet. We can safely reopen the Taidnapam North boat launch at approximately 719 feet. Looking at historical weather and inflow data, there is currently an 80% chance that we may reach 710 feet by sometime in mid-May, however, that is subject to change based on weather conditions.

We are eager to reopen the launches as soon as the weather cooperates. We provide updates on river flows, lake levels, and boat launch availability at: [MyTPU.org/LakeLevels](https://www.mytpu.org/LakeLevels).

*Have questions? Send them to [cowlitz@cityoftacoma.org](mailto:cowlitz@cityoftacoma.org). If you would like to receive updates about the Cowlitz River Project, please provide your name and email address at [MyTPU.org/CowlitzCurrents](https://www.mytpu.org/CowlitzCurrents).*