

Drought takes Caddo to near record low levels

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Caddo Lake water levels have almost reached a record all time low, and some experts believe the numbers could be even lower due to a stuck gauge. Currently, the elevation for Caddo Lake reads 166.87 feet mean sea level, which is only .74 higher than the lowest all-time elevation recorded on Nov. 2 of 1956.

However, some officials suspect the current elevation levels could be even lower due to the gauge being trapped by large amounts of debris created by the drought. "There are a couple different theories. Personally I think it is stuck. But we have been keeping a constant flow of water from Lake O' the Pines to Caddo Lake so that may be keeping the levels stable," said Northeast Texas Municipal Water District water quality team leader Lee Thomas.

Thomas said Caddo Lake officials have been in contact with members U.S. Geological Survey who are expected to check on the gauge this week. "We are curious as to why the recorded levels have not changed, considering the drought conditions," said Thomas.

According to records obtained by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Caddo Lake has remained at 166.88 to 166.87 for almost the entire month of September. Thomas mentioned, however, this could be from the 33 million gallons of water released into Caddo Lake from Lake O' The Pines on a daily basis.

"The water is not going to bring us out of a drought, but it will deter the conditions until we get rain," said Thomas. Thomas said two of Caddo Lake's tributaries, Little Cypress and Black Cypress Bayou have absolutely no water flow. He said Black Cypress has actually become intermittent, exposing dry areas of land in between the pools of water.

"It is pretty desperate situation right now, with three quarters or more of those not flowing whatsoever, it is not good," said Thomas. "I have been here all my life, never seen it go dry like this."

He said the good news is since Caddo Lake is much shallower than many of the Texas lakes; it will be able to fill up faster from rainfall. In fact, he said two years after Caddo Lake had its record low in water levels; it had its record high of water levels on May 11, 1958.

"We have had 10 inches of rain in one day, which helped the lake rise 14 feet," he said. "So that tells you how quickly it can change." He said until the rainfall, boaters need to be careful when operating off the regular boat roads. "Tree stumps can mess up the boats," he said. "And many boaters are not able to get to the boat roads, because they are unable to launch the boats because they are stored off the boat road."

He said he has heard from many spectators that they believe the lake is the "driest they have ever seen" but until officials can determine the reason for the unwavering recorded numbers, the current water level will continue to remain in about third place for the record low. "When they say they are seeing it as low as it has ever been, they may be very correct," he said.