

Gator Tales



Volume 7, Issue 25

Newsletter Date: Winter 2019

A newsletter for the citizens of the PRVWSD community

The Pearl River Valley Water Supply District

Giant Salvinia: The battle continues

PRVWSD to lower lake to 295 to fight final 2 percent

With 98 percent of the Giant Salvinia killed, and only one known small surviving colony located in Pelahatchie Bay, the Pearl River Valley Water Supply District is preparing for an assault on the invasive weed over the winter months.

It will start on Dec. 13 when PRVWSD begins the process of drawing down Barnett Reservoir to a level of 295 feet above mean sea level, or 2.5 feet below normal operation.

The plan, approved Nov. 21 by the Board of Directors at its monthly meeting, includes completing the drawdown by Jan. 1.

PRVWSD's project partner, the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks, will have January and all of February to burn, spray and annihilate the small colony found on the west side of the tip of an island, north of the main Pelahatchie Bay boat channel.

PRVWSD set a date of March 1 to begin raising the lake back to its normal level of 297.5.

"Lowering the water, controlled burning and intensive spraying all are proven weapons against Giant Salvinia, and combined they have helped us eliminate what our experts are telling us is 98 percent of the plant," PRVWSD general manager John Sigman said. "It is our hope that this next, drastic move will eliminate this final colony and allow us to begin on a long-term maintenance program to protect the reservoir from Giant Salvinia."



A helicopter from Provine Helicopters Inc., comes in to reload its herbicide tanks at Pelahatchie Shore Park in October. While it targeted other species, the main goal was eliminating Giant Salvinia (right).

Giant Salvinia: The battle continues

About the Northshore Causeway bridge ...

“When will the bridge on Northshore Causeway be open to boats traffic?”

Without a doubt, that’s the question most asked over the past year regarding PRVWSD’s effort to eradicate Giant Salvinia in Pelahatchie Bay.

Unfortunately, we still don’t know.

Rest assured, PRVWSD and our Salvinia partners are working hard to provide an answer, sooner than later, including designing a barrier system that can aid in containment of the invasive plant while providing a channel that will allow boats to move to and from the main lake to the Bay.

We have asked our partners to be thinking of a design and are open to suggestions. What you got?

Send ideas to:

comments@TheRez.ms.

So, just how low can The Rez go?

With an original plan to drop the lake level to 293.3 in December, a lot of questions came up about “levels” of Barnett Reservoir. It should be noted that lake level refers to the surface’s elevation in feet above mean sea level. The normal operating level is 297.5 feet above mean sea level.

Records dating back to 1990 indicate that the lowest the Reservoir has been in the last 30 years is 292.60 above mean sea level on Nov. 11 of 2000.

But, how low could it actually go?

The crest of the spillway is 276.

The intake for the Jackson Water Treatment Plant, located below the dam, is 273 feet, so even if the gates of the dam failed, the reservoir could still provide water to Jackson.

So, how high can it go?

The crest of the dam (Spillway Road westbound) is 308 feet, but the top of the emergency spillway is 300 feet. Anything over 300 would cause the emergency spillway (the gravel structure at the east end of the dam) to fail, as designed, to protect the integrity of the main dam.

Since impoundment in 1965, the highest recorded level was 299.79 during the Easter Flood of 1979, just mere inches below the top of the emergency spillway. All 10 gates were operated wide open with a maximum discharge of 140,000 cubic feet per second to lower the lake.



This satellite image from the Easter flood of 1979 shows The Rez at its highest recorded level - 299.79 - and highest release rate - 140,000 cubic feet per second. That's water on both sides of the dam.

We're all in this together: Clean! Drain! Dry!

The battle against invasive aquatic vegetation puts the entire Barnett Reservoir community on one team against Giant Salvinia and other notorious plants that threaten the future of our lake. As PRVWSD continues to fight the spread of vegetation - at a cost in excess of \$400,000 in 2019 alone - it is reminding its residential and commercial leaseholders and all user groups that you, too, have a stake in this battle.

“The days of just going fishing, trailering to the lake, launching, spending the day on the water, and then putting the boat back on the trailer and going home are over,” said touring bass pro Pete Ponds of Madison. “It’s on all of us to be more responsible and dedicated to making sure that we’re part of a solution and not part of a problem. We can do that by thoroughly inspecting, cleaning, draining and drying our boats and our trailers before and after each trip to the lake.”



The most common method of introducing invasive vegetation is on a boat or boat trailer. This one is covered in hyacinth.



PRVWSD currently has boat cleaning stations at three of its ramps: Pelahatchie Shore Park, Goshen Springs and the public launch at Highway 471 near Pelahatchie Bay Trading Post. With the 471 ramp expected to be closed during the drawdown, that cleaning station will be moved to Madison Landing. The public is urged to use this free service.

Giant Salvinia: The battle continues

Giant Salvinia: A change of plan

The PRVWSD's board action of Nov. 21 varied from a motion that came out of the Park's Policy Committee just three days earlier. That Committee, which has had oversight of the Giant Salvinia program, had approved a plan that included dropping the lake to 293.3, or over four feet below normal.

It was the level that PRVWSD's Giant Salvinia's partners had preferred to work on the final colony, but was one that proved extremely unpopular with residents, commercial interests and users of the 33,000-acre lake.

"Our Giant Salvinia task group and its experts had recommended 293.3 in fighting the last colony of the invasive plant," PRVWSD executive director John Sigman said. "It has been proven that lowering the water off the plant's range, and then burning and treating the area with herbicide is successful. By dropping the level to 295.5 last fall and then holding it to 296.1 most of this year, we killed 98 percent. But, it did not pull the water off this one area."

Experts from Mississippi State University, Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks, and others, told reservoir officials that dropping to a half-foot below the level on the affected area would give them access to burn it and treat it more effectively. However, they also said they could work with 295.

"After hearing public response and the hardships, including financial, that a level of 293.3 would cause, the Board decided on 295," Sigman said. "It is a level that our lake users, residents and businesses say they can live with, and that our Giant Salvinia partners could work with."

This photo from the University of Florida shows an above- and below-water view of Giant Salvinia.



Flame has been an effective tool on Giant Salvinia.

Timeline for drawdown to 295.0

Dec. 13: PRVWSD begins gradual drawdown of lake to 295.0. Weather permitting, this process should take about two weeks, without impacting downstream locations. During the drawdown some boat ramps throughout the district will become unusable. They will be closed as necessary. Boat owners with moored craft will have the rest of December to secure their boats. PRVWSD has placed a stay on its property maintenance regulations enforcement concerning the parking of boats on residential lease property.

January: As soon as drawdown is complete, MDWFP will begin prepping the site for burning. Time will allow exposed area to begin drying.

February: Treatment of area, including burning and spraying. After burning off the over brush and other vegetation to expose Giant Salvinia, MDWFP will begin surveying area and treating with herbicide spraying.

March 1 (or earlier): Once work has been completed, PRVWSD will begin raising lake back to normal operating level of 297.5.

April 1: PRVWSD and its partners begin a long-term program of control and maintenance of Giant Salvinia, with a key goal of reopening boat traffic at the Northshore Causeway bridge.



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Tracking water use simplified

Ever wondered how much water you are using, when you are using it and how current usage compares to the past? Some PRVWSD water customers can do that now and more will be soon thanks to a new website and mobile phone App called EyeOnWater. The website is EyeOnWater.com and the App is EyeOnWater. It is available via the Apple App Store for iPhones and via Google Play for Android devices.



To activate an account, you will need your zip code and your full 15-digit PRVWSD water account number from the lower left side of a previous bill. Launch the free EyeOnWaterApp on a mobile device or visit EyeOnWater.com from a computer.

At the prompt, enter your zip code, then the account number, and hit continue. You will then be instructed to create an account name - your email address - and to create a password of at least eight letters or numbers. Hit done. You will get a notice that you have been sent an email to verify the account. Open the email and click verify and you will be asked to sign in using the email for the account name and the password you created. Once in, you can track water usage by the minute, hour, day, month, year and the current day.

The agency is currently changing out individual home meters to the required, newer digital version and all customers should have them within 6 months. All Madison County customers have been updated, and crews are installing now in Rankin County subdivisions. All customers can open the free EyeOnWater account now, and the additional information will be available as new meters are installed.

PRVWSD puts stay on boat parking regulation enforcement

PRVWSD has placed a stay on its property maintenance regulations enforcement concerning the parking of boats on residential lease property for the duration of the temporary lowering of the lake. Except in subdivisions with covenants forbidding such action, leaseholders will be allowed to store their boats on their leased property.