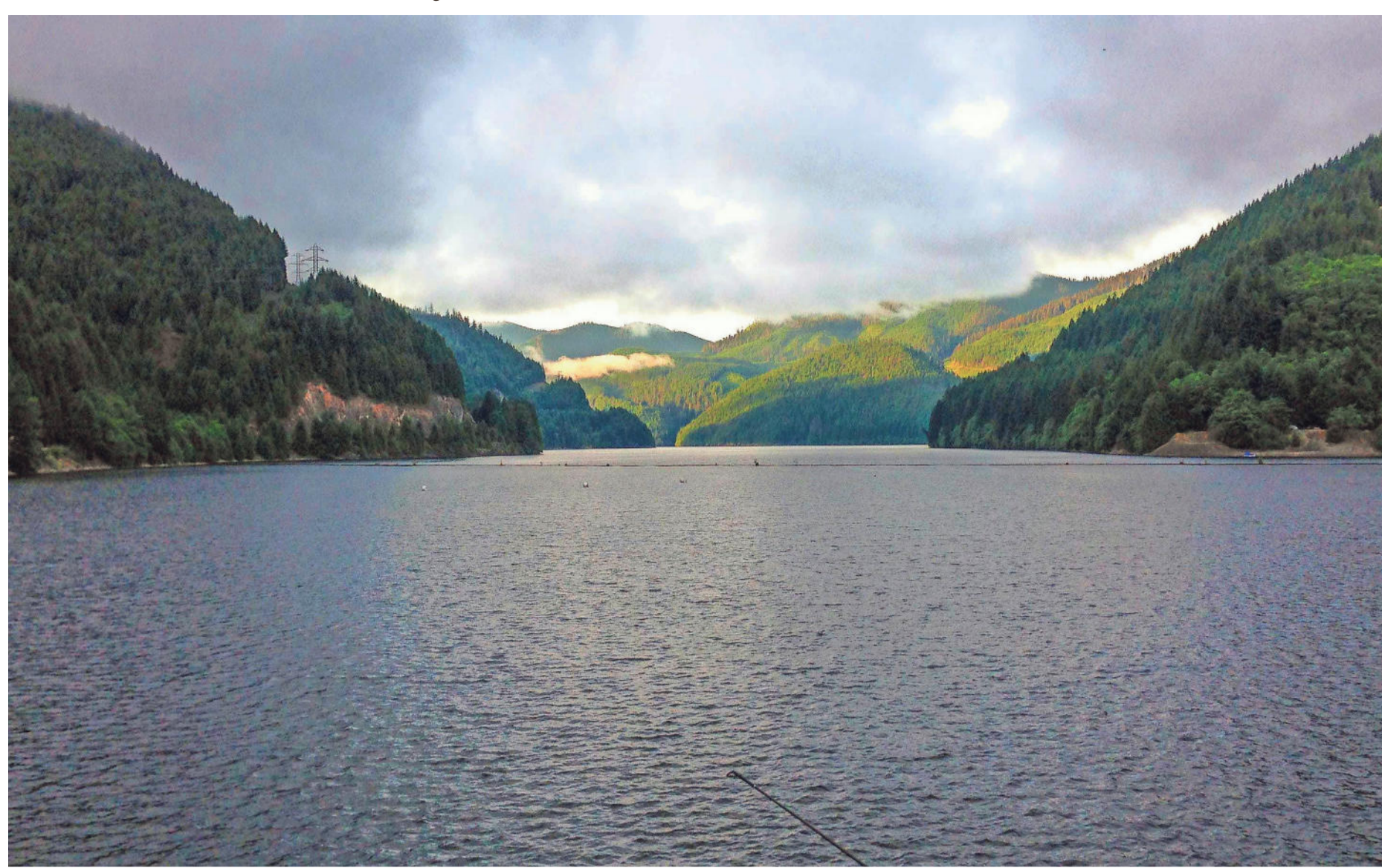


# Detroit Lake likely to reach full summertime water level



Detroit Lake is on schedule to reach its regular summer water level this year, following a disastrous season in 2015. STATESMAN JOURNAL FILE

**Zach Urness**  
Salem Statesman Journal  
USA TODAY NETWORK

For the second year in a row, Detroit Lake's water level is making a late spring rally.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers says refilling the popular reservoir east of Salem to its normal summertime water level is "very promising."

That's a big change from a few weeks ago, when the reservoir was more than 34 feet below normal and Corps officials said refill was unlikely.

The reason for the change has been twofold: an influx of rain that is expected to continue for the next week, in addition to quickly melting snow, plus a reduction in the amount of water Detroit Lake is releasing, Corps officials said.

"Refill at Detroit looks much more promising than even just two weeks ago," Army Corps spokeswoman Lauren Bennett said.

Currently, Detroit Lake sits at 1547.5 feet above sea level, which is 16 feet below the "full pool" level typically

reached by early May and where the lake sits during summer.

That's already a major improvement and means many docks can be put in. But that level should increase swiftly in the coming week, with rain expected five of the next six days.

In addition to the increased rain, the Corps said it reduced the amount of water being released into the North Santiam to minimum levels.

The Corps is required to release a certain amount of water into the North Santiam to help endangered salmon and steelhead following a 2008 legal agreement, but they also need to meet certain water temperature guidelines, which requires having enough water in the reservoir to mix together.

"The reduction in downstream flows was to improve refill at the reservoir to lengthen the ability to improve temperature operations, which is a reasonable and prudent alternative from the 2008 biological opinion," Bennett said.

The only negative is that recent warm temperatures have melted more than half of the snowpack in the Central Cascade Range. That's helped boost the

current level of Detroit Lake, but it also means that it won't be around to keep the reservoir at higher levels into the late summer.

"The high elevation snow would generally help supplement inflows late-summer to help keep boat ramps in longer," Bennett said. "Warm spring temps are melting off a lot of that snow now, helping to increase current inflows but decreasing the amount of snow left for later season inflows."

In other words, while the reservoir appears increasingly likely to reach its normal summertime level, it may not stay there as long as normal, into August, for example.

It's the second year in a row Detroit Lake has rallied. The spring of 2019 was also very dry until heavy April rains made the reservoir jump 45 feet in a few days, during an event that flooded parts of the southern Willamette Valley.

### Mongold Boat Ramp reopens, but Detroit businesses push for state park reopening

While a full pool water level at Detroit

Lake is critical for local business, it's far from a normal spring at the tourist-focused destination.

Closures of Oregon's outdoor recreation sites, due to COVID-19, began lifting last week, allowing Detroit Lake to open Mongold Boat Ramp. Some hotels and motels have started reopening, and RV sites are filling up.

But one major missing piece is campgrounds. Detroit Lake State Park will remain closed to camping for the foreseeable future, and it's unclear when the collection of Forest Service campsites on the south end of the lake will reopen.

"It's been a tough few months for Detroit," said Dean O'Donnell, owner of Mountain High Grocery. "If they open the state park and campgrounds, business will be much improved."

Zach Urness has been an outdoors reporter, photographer and videographer in Oregon for 12 years. Urness is the author of "Best Hikes with Kids: Oregon" and "Hiking Southern Oregon." He can be reached at [zurness@StatesmanJournal.com](mailto:zurness@StatesmanJournal.com) or (503) 399-6801. Find him on Twitter at @ZachsORoutdoors.

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