

## Water level at Eagle Lake reportedly too low

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Dec. 18, 2007 — The water level in Eagle Lake, north west of Susanville, is visibly low, and that has many people concerned. “In the last few years, it’s gone down, and it hasn’t come back,” said David Atteberry, a Spalding resident who is employed at the marina there. “It’s still going down.”

“It’s definitely on a downhill slide,” said Maurice Anderson, chief planner for the Lassen County Community Development Office, where records of lake levels are recorded.

“It had some effect this fishing season in that we had to close our north launch ramp,” said Frank Beckett, a Spalding resident and board member of the Spalding Community Services District. “It was real shallow, and the large boats could not get out. So, we closed it.”

“About 100 yards straight out from the south launching ramp it’s only 2 1/2 to 3 feet deep,” said Dr. Owen Bateson, a local chiropractor who has a home on Eagle Lake, noting that the remaining ramp may also be in jeopardy of closure if the present trend continues.

The lake presently sets at 5,099 feet above sea level, as measured in November.

By way of comparison, in 1916, when the records began, Eagle Lake stood at 5,125 feet above sea level — the highest level on record.

“That would put almost all of Spalding under water,” said Bateson.

The lowest level came in 1935, when it dropped to a meager 5,091 feet. This, observers agree, was probably due to the diversion through the Bly Tunnel, which ended that year.

In spite of ups and downs, lake levels gradually rebounded in the 60 subsequent years, though they took another plunge in 1994 to a low of 5,097 feet, a mere six feet above the record low.

Once again, levels rose, reaching 5,108 feet in 1999 before beginning a decline to a low of 5,099 feet in 2005.

Putting the present levels in perspective, Bateson said, “It’s two feet deeper now than it was in 1994.

“Normally, the highest months are May and June. And, normally, the lowest is going to be in September and October,” said Bateson, describing the lake’s seasonal fluctuations.

Nevertheless, anyone looking at the lake can tell that the levels are troublesomely low.

“Should we be alarmed? Well, that’s kind of a tricky question,” Anderson said, declining to speculate. “Certainly, it’s sort of alarming to me, personally. I fish in the lake; I recreate there. Right now, there’s a definite relationship of the water level to the pH level, and that affects the fish and the overall health of the lake.”

But Anderson also sounded a note of caution saying, “The lake has had a lot of ups and downs over the last 100 years. ... we’ve had more; we’ve had less.”

He should know, since Anderson is in charge of keeping the records of water levels on Eagle Lake.

Characterizing himself as not overly concerned just yet, he admits the situation bears careful scrutiny over the coming months.

“For the last ... oh, five years ... there has definitely been a pattern. ... Every year there’s just a little less water in the lake. So, it has been going down,” said Anderson.

Bateson, on the other hand, is clearly already concerned.

“We only had 12 percent of our average rainfall during November. And right now, we are way down in December also,” he said. “Considering the past 17 months, we are down 10.38 inches of rainfall.

“If we don’t get quite a bit of precipitation this year and the lake loses another two or three feet of water by next August or September, we’re going to be in big trouble,” said Bateson, continuing. “You may not be able to launch your boat at Spalding or anywhere on the lake, for that matter.”

Noting that “we were lower in 1994 than we are right now,” Bateson is still nervous about what the future might hold.

“If the precipitation keeps going down like it has, it’s not going to be a very good situation.”

The current drought conditions have already had an effect on the tourist business in Spalding. Due to the closure of the north ramp at the marina, “we had some congestion in the south launch ramp with people trying to get out at the peak of our fishing season, October and November,” said Beckett. “If we have a dry winter and it continues, businesses will be hurting.”

Fewer visitors or tourists means less fishing and recreation on the lake.

“If they’re not up here to spend money, it hurts our businesses and those that are employed by those businesses,” said Beckett.

The considerable income in fees that the marina generates for the community might also be diminished.

“This year, we haven’t noticed any change from last year as far as receipts from the marina,” said Merle Lay, general manager of the SCSD.

Property values, which had just begun to climb after the slump caused by the now lifted building ban in Spalding, might take a tumble again.

“This year it hasn’t had a huge effect,” said Beckett. “But if it’s sustained over a number of years, it will have an effect on property values.”

“It’s going to take a long time to recover with this drought situation,” said Atteberry.

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