

# Who Gives a Dam?

Would a break in Wolf Creek Dam affect Dale Hollow?

By Darren Shell

With the barrage of questions stemming from the Lake Cumberland ordeal swirling in the Dale Hollow current, I've set out to give some insight over the impending troubles concerning Corps lakes and the inherent problems about a possible dam failure. It seems that everyday we have a new press release or breaking news story aimed at stirring public panic about the breaking of Wolf Creek Dam on Lake Cumberland. I claim to have no special inside knowledge or even rock solid statistics regarding a possible breakage. After all, it is all guess work on behalf of those forced to put a time frame on such a catastrophe. I don't relish the job that these specialists are forced to undertake. Only Mother Nature and the good Lord above know the answers to such rough and tumble questions. This much is certain...the water tables of many Corps lakes will suffer severe levels in both the high and low ranges. We will witness abnormally high water levels and extreme low levels on Dale Hollow this year and perhaps in future years in efforts to manage the well-being of the river below us. When Cumberland above us and Center Hill below us reach their lower levels and are no longer able to fulfill their usual flow of water downstream, Dale Hollow will be forced to use its reserves of water to feed the river. And even though Dale Hollow would not suffer the immediate effects of a severe break in these other two lakes, there would certainly be an impact on the lake through the devastation caused throughout the entire Cumberland River chain. I don't believe anyone can fully predict the implications that could occur with a failure of any one of our Corps dams. There are simply too many variables in this huge spectrum of possibilities.

So despite the harshness of these water tables and all the horrid possibilities involved in a major breakage, conditions such as these are precisely what the dams were designed to do in the beginning...control water flow.

These thoughts being said, I'd like to give a slightly different point of view. I'd like to tell you...who gives a dam.

For Dale Hollow, it started in 1942. As this country was sending its young men off to World War II, the U S Army Corps was developing enormous plans. They were buying large sums of land with intentions of building a number of lakes. Each of which was designed for flood control and for the generation of electric power. It was an enormous undertaking, all funded by the United States government. The American taxpayer was paying for these huge projects. The American public was giving a dam.

Also during this time of buying and building, a number of other people were feeling the pain of moving their homes away from the lands that were being purchased. These folks were forced to leave their homes and farms where their families had lived for

generations. The communities of their youth were being demolished for the building of these large lakes. This solemn group of people was paying a dear price. These people were giving a dam.

In the years that followed the Dale Hollow project, other lakes were formed. The same process was being repeated. Countless communities were being disrupted. Once again, for flood control. And also, once again, these people were giving a dam.

Then, the 1970s happened. Corps officials stood bewildered on the top of Wolf Creek Dam, looking for a solution to a major leak that had developed in the core wall of the earthen dam. A plan was made to cut a giant ditch through the dam and fill it with concrete, thus making a dam within a dam. Once again, the American tax payers gave a dam, continuing the cycle.

And here we stand today, evaluating a much worse and threatening leak in Wolf Creek Dam of Lake Cumberland. Specialists say it won't last long enough to get it fixed. Now, hundreds of millions of dollars must be spent to fix a very old problem, if in fact it can be fixed in time. Will it be fixed right this time? And if we can't fix it in time, should we even start? Five hundred million new dollars washed downstream?!!! Hey tax payers...brother, can you spare a dam?

And what of our friends downstream in the floodplain? Lives could be in danger. Millions more dollars will be spent on insurance, evacuation planning, emergency health care...even the rebuilding process afterward. Thousands more people giving a dam.

There are lives at stake above Lake Cumberland, too. Marinas will set on dry land. Businesses that thrive on lake-tourist income will dry up like the lake they love. Water supplies for entire cities will be non-existent. A way of life for many will discontinue. All of these are terrible prices to pay. Thus adding to the thousands of people giving a dam.

So, I guess my long-winded point about Cumberland's effects on Dale Hollow is this: Dale Hollow will see more unfamiliar boats this year, those traveling farther south from Cumberland in search of water. But this is the least of the troubles that could occur. Sure, the waters from a broken Wolf Creek Dam would not reach the shores of Dale Hollow, but the repercussions that could follow in years to come will be much worse if we no longer give a dam. And as American tax payers, I think we all do.