

PRESS RELEASE

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UPDATE ON SUMMER NAVIGATION OPPORTUNITIES ALONG LEEDS & LIVERPOOL, PEAK FOREST AND MACCLESFIELD CANALS

The Canal & River Trust regrets to confirm that navigation opportunities along the Leeds & Liverpool, Peak Forest and Macclesfield canals this summer will be restricted due to the combined effect of reduced reservoir capacity and one of the driest springs on record.

Keeping boats moving during the peak holiday months of July and August is now the top priority and the Trust's operational and water management teams are working hard to conserve enough water now to ensure this happens. In July, the three canals will be fully open to navigation but with certain restrictions, to be confirmed at a later date. This is likely to coincide with when Government lockdown guidelines change to allow boaters to stay overnight on their boats, and holiday hire boats to start operating again; until then, opportunities for leisure boating will unfortunately be limited in any case.

To conserve water and ensure we are able to offer navigation in July and August, the three North West canals will not be re-opened on 1st June when coronavirus navigation restrictions are relaxed across the rest of the canal network. However, the Trust is planning to offer boaters a 'window' for emergency boat movements sometime in the next couple of weeks; we'll be confirming these dates later this week.

Boaters will still be able to cruise along lock-free sections of the canals but, according to government guidance, will not be able to stay overnight on their boats, unless they live aboard. The canals will continue to be open for towpath use, and for angling, canoeing and other un-powered boats as long as the Government's social distancing rules are strictly observed.

Due to the dry weather, the reservoir holding for the Leeds & Liverpool Canal is currently only 62% of its capacity - far below what is required for unrestricted use of the canal at this stage of the year. Despite the wet winter, the canal relies on a regular supply of rainfall throughout the year to replenish its resources, and the last three months have been exceptionally dry. This includes the driest April on record as measured by the summit reservoir rain gauge and an even dryer May. This is coupled with the fact that key reservoirs are not currently able to operate at peak capacity due to vital maintenance work.

The operation of the Peak Forest and Macclesfield canals has been severely hampered by the loss of Toddbrook Reservoir, near Whaley Bridge, which is currently undergoing a major repair project.

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The Trust has carried out a wide-ranging programme of upgrade and repair works over the winter to improve the water supplies from nearby Combs Reservoir as well as Bosley and Sutton reservoirs. The Trust has also arranged with the Environment Agency for water to pass from Combs reservoir via local brooks into the River Goyt and pumped from there into the Peak Forest Canal, whilst repairs to the feeder are addressed, to ensure that the supply is robust.

Daniel Greenhalgh, Canal & River Trust North West Director, said: “The last few years have seen long dry periods and hence have been extremely challenging for water supply for these three North West canals; we appreciate it must be frustrating for boaters despite the efforts we are making.

“We are acutely aware that boating businesses and private boaters alike have suffered from the major disruption caused by the coronavirus lockdown, and now followed by navigation restrictions caused by a lack of water. Over the last few years we have spent large sums on works to make the North West’s canal network more robust including works to reservoirs and embankments, plugging leaks and repairing culverts. We will continue to review how we manage the water supply available to give the best service we can to both private boaters and businesses on these canals in future.”

For the latest information about navigation on the Leeds & Liverpool, Peak Forest and Macclesfield canals, check out the Canal & River Trust website www.canalrivertrust.org.uk.

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Notes to Editors:

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to people’s lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day www.canalrivertrust.org.uk.

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