

PRESS RELEASE

23 June 2022

RESERVOIR WORK AND DRY SPRING CAUSE WATER-SAVING CANAL CLOSURE

The Canal & River Trust has taken the difficult decision to temporarily close locks, restricting navigation on the Peak Forest and Macclesfield canals from 24 June as a combination of essential reservoir repairs and a dry spring have caused water supplies in the North West to drop to historically low levels.

The Peak Forest and Macclesfield canals are usually supplied with water by four reservoirs. However, essential maintenance works at Bosley Reservoir over the winter requiring the reservoir to be drawn down, coupled with the on-going repair works at Toddbrook Reservoir, resulted in the main boating season starting with much less stored water than normal (see notes to editors).

To enable navigation on the canals for as long as possible, the Trust introduced restricted use of the lock flights at the start of April, and volunteer lock keepers have been helping to manage boat traffic at lock flights to ensure water supplies are used as efficiently as possible.

A dry spring, with March through to May only receiving 67% of the long-term average rainfall, means that the reservoirs which are still operational have not had a chance to refill. Unfortunately, this means that through navigation on the canals won't be possible until water levels have recovered. The towpath will remain open and boaters will still be able to cruise the stretches between the closed locks.

The Trust is continuing the ongoing water saving repair works to increase all available water flows into the canal network. While essential safety works were carried out at Bosley Reservoir the Trust took the opportunity to dredge and remove vegetation on all the feeders, increasing water flows and reducing losses. At Sutton Reservoir repair and improvement work is underway to improve control of feeds, allowing the Trust to maximise water flows, and dredging and vegetation clearance works have been completed. Repair works are being carried out at Combs Reservoir along the feeder channel, while at Marple Lock Flight recent works have been completed to dredge and reduce water losses. The Trust is also pumping water from Combs Reservoir via the River Goyt into the canal until the feeder is fully operational.

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Daniel Greenhalgh, regional director for the North West at Canal & River Trust, said: “The Peak Forest and Macclesfield canals have had more than their fair share of troubles over recent years and we’ve put every effort into keeping them open for boaters. Unfortunately the ongoing repair works at Toddbrook Reservoir as well as emergency works at Bosley Reservoir, coupled with far less rainfall than we needed, have meant that there just isn’t enough water for navigation and we’ve taken the incredibly hard decision to close the locks to boat traffic until water levels recover. We will be carefully watching how the reservoirs refill and will open the locks as soon as possible.

“We’ve been carrying out a significant amount of water savings maintenance work over the past few years and in the longer term, once all our reservoirs are back open. This will improve the resilience of the canals, which is more important than ever as climate change shows us long dry spells are becoming the new normal.

“We appreciate what an impact this has on boaters in the area and we are sorry that this will affect cruising plans this summer. If anyone is experiencing any problems please get in touch.”

To find out more about stoppages and water levels affecting navigation, please visit canalrivertrust.org.uk/notices.

This video gives more information about the Trust’s reservoir works:
canalrivertrust.org.uk/specialist-teams/managing-our-water/reservoir-works-and-water-resources

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For further media requests please contact:

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Notes to editors

Peak Forest and Macclesfield canals current holdings – based on level readings taken on 13 June 2022

Reservoir	Maximum Holding (MI)	Current Holding (MI)	% full
Toddbrook	1238	Cannot supply canal	Cannot supply canal
Combs	1363	864	63%
Bosley	1347	344	26%

Sutton	346	148	43%
Total	4294	1356	32%