

NEWSLETTER No. 5 Little Bitterroot Lake Association



The Dam - Our Lake Level - Whose Water? - New "Updated" Information

A Report by Capt Dan LBLA on the Little Bitterroot Lake (LBL) Dam. CaptainDanNWA@centurytel.net

Before the Dam was built in 1916-17 (enlarged in 1918) LBL existed at a lower lake level. The Dam built up a level of water capacity that could be managed. The purpose was primarily for irrigation. If the dam ever failed, the lake would return to a level much like it was in 1915.

The dam's drain height is 8.5 ft tall (See Pictures on Page 4 and 5). 8.5 ft of water measured over the entire 3,000-acre lake is 25,000 acre-ft (3,000-acre x 8.5 ft = 25,000 acre-ft).

On Jun 11th, 2023, we allegedly had 49% Dam Reservoir Capacity in the lake, (measured elevation was 3902.4 Above Sea Level- ASL by CSKT) which is approx. 12,500 acre-ft of water (Chart on Page 3). As of August 29, 2023, the water level was bottomed-out inside the dam (See Pictures on Page 4 and 5). Once the dam capacity has exited the lake the only way to get more water out of the lake would be to pump it over the dam. Allegedly a pumping "over the dam" event was attempted years ago (a rumor), and your association stopped it - More on that story later – Still investigating.

In recent conversations with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation (CSKT) and Flathead Indian Irrigation Project (FIIP) I have been told the following (Note: No written documents received on item 1 below):

- 1) The authorized usage of water for Indian irrigation originating 1916 to 1918 from LBL is - 25,000 acre-ft. According to CSKT when the water level gets to 3898 ASL the dam bottoms out. We think FIIP's authorized water use ends at when the dam bottoms out and with the use of all 25,000 acre-ft. I have been told that the authorized use is what the dam was built for - PERIOD. Allegedly, no more water is "authorized" to be drawn from our lake once the "granted" amount (25,000 acre-ft) is used.
- 2) The dam is checked periodically by CSKT and FIIP. We think they set the height of the dam at 3898 ASL – free flow. However, flow is restricted by downstream canals capacity (Not sure how this works...I will keep investigating).
- 3) Regarding the Infamous "Compact". Below is what the Eric Hall at CSKT said to me:

"The Compact does establish minimum reservoir pool levels for FIIP reservoirs (Appendix 3.1), including one off-reservation reservoir (Hubbart, which is on the Little Bitterroot River downstream of Little Bitterroot Lake). But Little Bitterroot Lake is not part of the FIIP infrastructure, and the Compact does not establish a minimum reservoir pool level for Little Bitterroot Lake so the Ordinance will not impact lake levels there.

That said, the Tribes did install a monitoring station on Little Bitterroot Lake for informational purposes, which reports the lake water level by elevation. That real-time data can be accessed by going to the CSKT Water Data Web Portal (<https://cskt.aquaticinformatics.net/Data>), and changing the Parameter field at the top from 'Discharge' to 'Lake/res elevation. Hope that helps. Let us know if additional info is needed,

Eric Hull

Water Rights Specialist
CSKT Natural Resources Department"

Editorial Comment by Dan: It is very interesting that Eric said we would not be impacted by the Compact. If anyone has information about the Compact with reference to LBL – Call or email me!

Additional Information: On August 24, 2023, I surveyed the dam. Currently we are approximately 3 ft from the bottom of the dam's capacity according to the CSKT daily measurement system. (See how YOU can daily view the lake level in "blue" below). A look at the intake of the dam shows maybe a foot to go NOT 3 ft...Possibly over the years sediment has deposited in front of the dam limiting the depth of water at the intake of the dam.

In conclusion: Who manages/owns the water capacity of LBL? Short Answer (for over the last 100 years) is the Flathead Indian Irrigation Project of the Flathead Indian Reservation (FIIP). But it is not quite that simple – please see additional explanation below.

Definitions, Contact Information and Web Sites (for more detail):

CSKT - Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation (406 885-2888)

BIA - Bureau of Indian Affairs: protects trust assets between the United States and Native American Tribes

FIIP - Flathead Indian Irrigation Project: manages irrigation canals and reservoirs related to the Flathead Reservation (406 745-2661)

DNRC - MT Dept of Natural Resources and Conservation: Oversees the states natural resources including issuing and managing water rights in Montana

FRWMB – The Flathead Reservation Water Management Board: – implements the CSKT-MT Compact including issuing water rights on the Flathead Reservation (406 201-2532)

- [Flathead Reservation Water Management Board \(mt.gov\)](https://www.mt.gov/flathead-reservation-water-management-board)

CSKT-MT Compact – The Compact: a water rights agreement between the State of Montana, CSKT, and the United States.

- For more information: <https://dnrc.mt.gov/Water-Resources/Compacts/Flathead-Compact>
- Story and history of the Compact and the Ordinance: [The CSKT Water Compact has been enacted \(arcgis.com\)](https://www.arcgis.com/story/arcgis.com)

CSKT has reserved water through negotiations outlined in the Compact. CSKT has no direct control over lake levels of LBL – FIIP does...

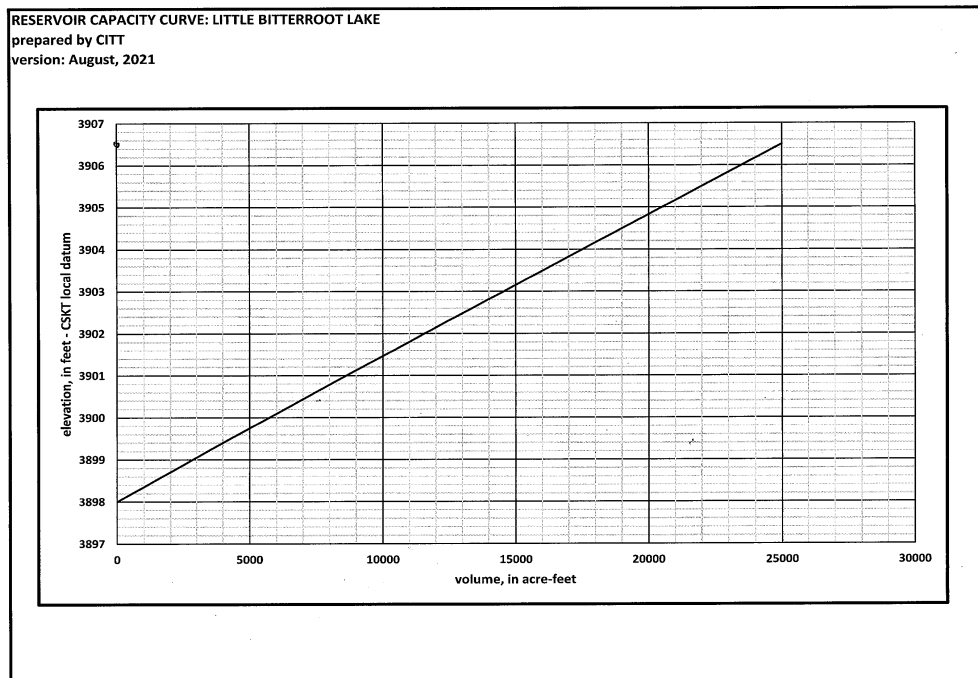
Several reservoirs on and associated with the Flathead Reservation have “minimum pool levels” set forth by the Compact, including Hubbard Reservoir. LBL feeds Hubbard and Hubbard is managed by FIIP. The Compact outlines a minimum reservoir level for Hubbard Reservoir (and other reservoirs). A minimum pool level was not established for LBL through the Compact.

In 2022, CSKT installed a monitoring system on LBL. Anyone can view the lakes level at any time via a web Portal <https://cskt.aquaticinformatics.net/Data>. Just change the parameter field from “discharge” to “Lake/res elevation.”

Max and Min DRAWS- The LBL dam bottom level is 3898’ elevation (above sea level). That is the lowest draw point vs. the highest dam level possible at 3906.5’ (That is a range of approx. 8.5’ – and totals 25,000 acre-ft of water). This means that if the lake level drops below 3898’ elevation, then it is not due to losing water via the dam. Other factors, such as yearly precipitation and weather, can impact lake levels.

Want to make a change – Contact State Rep. Paul Fielder paul.fielder@legmt.gov 406 210-5943 or Sen. Dist 7 Bob Brown bob.brown@legmt.gov 406 242-0141.

See Reservoir Capacity Curve: Little Bitterroot Lake



Are you CONCERNED about septic, well, and/or sanitation VIOLATION?
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WOW!!! NEW RECORD Membership Achieved in 2023 - 127 MEMBERS. WOW!!!



NOTICE TO ALL - Whitefish Lake Institute Sponsored - Montana Lakes Conference on October 18 - 20, 2023 at The Lodge at Whitefish Lake / Whitefish, MT. The 2023 Montana Lakes Conference will explore solutions to challenges facing Montana Lakes today. Over 40 Montana lake and aquatic ecology experts, as well as guest speakers. **PLEASE ATTEND**

