

Notice for non-tidal Thames boaters

Low flows - impacts on boating

Low flows - what to be aware of

Over the last 12 months we have received significantly less than average rainfall in Thames Area. This has resulted in us seeing below average groundwater levels and below average flows in the rivers across our area including the River Thames. The flow in the River Thames is dramatically lower than we would expect for this time of year. Due to the low flows, water levels in the non-tidal River Thames may be shallower than you are used to in some places.

With this in mind we are asking boaters to take extra care, especially immediately downstream of locks where the natural gradient of the river means levels are always slightly lower than elsewhere in the reach.

What we are doing to protect our water resources

We will do all that we can to maintain the depths of navigation for as long as we can. Our published depths can be found here: www.gov.uk We will also ask our lock staff to advise you of any known shallow areas ahead of you. To help you assess whether or not to continue your journey, you may want to check your boat's draft if you don't already know it. Above Iffley Lock we cannot guarantee the navigation channel will always be sufficiently deep for craft with a draft of 0.9m or more.

We are closing our weirs and placing 'summer boards' on those that can accommodate them to raise their height. This helps to maintain water levels for a longer period of time. We are also carrying out additional checks for any leaks in our weir gates and ensuring they are repaired or staunches where possible.

We have asked our lock staff not to use hoses or sprinklers to water the flowers, plants and grass around the locks.

If the river flow continues to drop, it will be increasingly difficult for us to maintain water depths within the reaches, even if we implement additional measures such as restricted lock use. We hope to avoid the need for additional compulsory measures but may not be able to if existing weather conditions persist.

What you can do to protect our water resources

We will be instructing our lock staff to try to avoid emptying locks unless they contain at least one boat. This ensures we are making the most of the considerable volume of water that is released downstream each time a lock is used. Where possible please share the lock with as many boats as you can, always let the lock keeper know if there are boats travelling behind you in the reach so that they can share the lock with you and avoid unnecessary water losses.

We all need to be as conservative as possible with our use of treated drinking water as much of this in our area is abstracted from the River. Do not use our drinking water hoses to wash boats. They may be used to fill water tanks but must not be used for washing down boats. Similarly, we would encourage you not to use hoses from the treated drinking water system to wash down your boats at other sources. We would also encourage you to consider not to use hoses or sprinklers at home to water your gardens. We all need to do our part to conserve water usage to ensure that we can continue boating for as long as possible during this prolonged dry period.

We are of course monitoring the situation very closely and will communicate any further developments you need to be aware of. You can subscribe to get advised of any river restrictions and closures by emailing riverthames@environment-agency.gov.uk. You can also check the 'Information for boaters' section of <http://riverconditions.environment-agency.gov.uk> for updates.

Thank you for your understanding and co-operation.