

EDENVILLE DAM IMPOUNDMENT DRAWDOWN

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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INTRODUCTION

Work crews have been performing emergency modifications to the Edenville Dam spillway and the Tobacco River channel downstream of the dam. The work was ordered by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy in September 2020 and was started in December 2020. The major impact is lowering the Tobacco River spillway by more than 20 feet, which will bring the water levels on the Tobacco side of the dam down by an estimated 12 feet, but less than that the farther upstream. This will make for dangerous ice conditions and residents and recreators are warned to stay off the ice for the rest of the winter.

1. What work is being done at the spillway and downstream?

The Tobacco River spillway crest will be lowered to reduce the height of the Tobacco impoundment to address dam safety concerns and restore flow to the downstream river. The work will also alleviate river flow strains on the collapsed M-30 causeway (which the Michigan Department of Transportation is replacing with a temporary bridge), minimize upstream impacts and address concerns about the dam’s stability. The Tittabawassee River spillway will be demolished and modified to restore flow to the abandoned river channel. Also, sediment and debris will be removed from the river upstream and downstream of the spillway.



2. What is the impact on water levels around the dam?

Water levels behind the Tobacco River side of the dam will drop by an estimated 12 feet, but the change in levels will be less at locations upstream. Lowering the spillway will allow for more water to flow through the dam and into its natural downstream channel. The Tittabawassee River water levels won’t likely change significantly as its impoundment was nearly fully drawn down when the dam breached in May 2020; however, the ice on the river could still be dangerous due to changing water conditions. The drawdown of the impoundment behind the spillway will increase the rate of the water flow downstream in the Tobacco River channel, but is not expected to have a significant impact on water levels.

3. How long will it take to lower the water levels?

The approved rate of dewatering is one foot per day, so it will take approximately 12 days to reduce the water of the impoundment to a safe level.

4. What is the impact on residents of lowering the water level?

The biggest danger to the public is the unsteady nature of the ice in the water behind the dam. EGLE is urging the public to stay off the ice for the rest of the winter. As the water level drops, the current north of the dam will become stronger, causing ice to thin or break apart in some places and creating gaps below the ice that may not support those fishing or recreating in the area. The main area where the public is cautioned to stay off the ice is from Dale Road south to the dam. Residents south of the dam will notice faster flowing water in the Tobacco River and ice that is breaking up in area where water had been stagnant. Residents throughout Gladwin and Midland Counties along the Tobacco River should stay off the ice, as well.

5. Are there any other impacts?

Once the water level is reduced, the public will see larger areas of exposed and unstable bottomlands, which may contain debris, tree stumps, dock pilings or other material that could be dangerous. Area residents will also notice steeper slopes along the Tobacco River impoundment area. It's best to stay off the ice and off the bottomlands.

6. How is the public being notified?

EGLE is working with state and local partners to alert the public through a number of resources. Local media has been notified. EGLE and other state agencies are posting messages on social media. EGLE has also posted the information to the Michigan.gov/EdenvilleDamFailure webpage. Highly visible signs have been posted at Department of Natural Resources and other public access areas. Fliers have been distributed around the impacted area at bait shops, retail shops and restaurants.

7. Will the work affect water wells in the area?

It's unclear what impact the work related to the safety measures at the Edenville dam will have on the water table and property owners' wells. Long-term effects of changes in water levels or shifting water tables caused by the collapse of the dams will not be known for some time, but some shallow water wells near the shores of the former lakes have gone dry. There are a number of reasons that residents may be having issues with their wells, including that the depths of the well may not be sufficient. If residents are experiencing troubles with their wells, they should contact the emergency managers for either Midland or Gladwin Counties or the local health department. Local officials may be able to offer help with funding or resources to repair or drill deeper wells.

8. Why is EGLE doing the work at the dam?

EGLE has significant concerns over the safety of the remaining portions of the Edenville Dam, the continued impact on natural resources and the prospect of a future flood that could send a wave of water that is 10-15 feet downstream, if the dam were to fail again. That amount of water would have a severe impact on residents, infrastructure, homes, businesses and natural resources between Edenville Dam and the Sanford impoundment. Lesser flooding extents would be expected downstream of the Sanford Dam. Modifying the Tobacco River spillway, restoring the Tobacco and Tittabawassee Rivers to their natural channels and clearing debris and sediment will be the best short-term protective measures for area residents and businesses.



9. What does the emergency work mean for the dam's future?

The work under the emergency order is necessary to meet time-sensitive needs to address site concerns about the safety of the dam and ongoing impacts to public safety, transportation and natural resources. The work has been coordinated with Four Lakes Task Force, which owns the dam, and does not impact any final decision on the dam's future or the timeframe to decide how to move forward. Those determinations are to be made by the dam's owner and not by any state agency or department. EGLE is generally supportive of maintaining or removing existing dams, provided that either option is carried out in a safe manner and in accordance with applicable laws. EGLE is fully committed to working with the dam's owner and local stakeholders as they work toward a determination of whether or not the Edenville Dam will be restored.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Dam Safety Program website](#)
- [Edenville Dam Failure website](#)
- [Michigan Dam Safety Task Force website](#)
- [Michigan Dam Safety Task Force draft recommendations](#)
- [Preliminary Report on the Edenville Dam Failure, Response Efforts, and Program Reviews](#)
- [Edenville Dam failure internal and external reviews](#)

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