

Lake Tahoe's high-water mark leveling off

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

After experiencing its sixth most impressive rise in more than a century, a brimming Lake Tahoe is leveling off.

Soon, maybe today and for sure within a week, Tahoe will begin a slow but steady drop as evaporation rates exceed inflow from the Tahoe Basin's streams.

"It's almost there. It was a heck of a ride," said Dave Wathen, a federal hydrologist and deputy water master.



There is no sand for dogs to romp on at Regan Beach in South Lake Tahoe.

Photo/LTN

Rising waters have had beachgoers crowding onto smaller patches of sand all around the lake. Paul Mileo of Zephyr Cove Resort estimated there's about 40 feet less beach than last summer.

Gradually, that situation will start to change as evaporation lowers the lake.

But not by much. Even on the hottest and windiest days, when evaporation levels are at their greatest, the lake will lower only by a quarter-inch or so per day, Wathen said.

How much the lake will lower before rain and snow start to raise levels again come winter is unknown and largely dependent on weather conditions. One projection by the Water Master's Office suggests levels could drop about 1.5 feet between now and the end of the year.

That could expose a few more feet of beach, but maybe not before it's too cold for beachgoers to notice.

On Tuesday, Tahoe's water level was 6,229.41 feet above sea level – the same point it was at the previous two days, Wathen said. That's only about 8 inches below Tahoe's federally mandated legal limit and far above where lake levels sat prior to an epic winter.

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