

Marion officials working to resolve water shortage after state emergency declaration

WKMS | By [Derek Operle](#)

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An attempt to drain Lake George in Crittenden County via a controlled breach after erosion developed into a sinkhole in the levee resulted in a water shortage for the county seat of Marion.

Officials in the Crittenden County seat are working to overcome a water shortage as summer gets off a hot start across Kentucky.

The shortage in Marion stems from an attempt to drain Lake George, the city-run system's primary water source, to prevent an uncontrolled breach [after erosion that later developed into a sinkhole in the levee was detected in April.](#)

Marion city administrator Adam Ledford said the risk of an uncontrolled breach of a full Lake George could have unleashed 183 million gallons of water on the community of a little under 3,000 residents, potentially impacting City Lake – which is where the water system is primarily drawing from at present – along with city's water plant, multiple bridges, private developments and Crittenden Community Hospital.

Members of local agencies attempted to drain the lake, but were unable to make significant progress before a controlled breach became necessary. This breach depleted roughly a year's water supply from the lake and evaluations of City Lake by the Division of Water found it to hold significantly less water than previously thought – only as much as 18 days' worth instead of a full month's.

“When it comes to natural resources that affect the human condition, water is paramount to all of it, Ledrod said. “We can live without electricity, we can live without the Internet. One thing you definitely can't live without is water. And it becomes something that we sometimes take for granted.”

Ledford estimates the city has, at most, a 19-day supply of water on hand.

“Throughout that process, we were able to begin to put together the picture that it looked like what was causing the issue had something to do with our intake system and damage to our intake system that runs underneath the levee and into the bottom of the lake,” Ledford said. “Bad went to worse ... we lost over a week's water supply just because of new data that was developed on our secondary source, which had now become our primary source. So, in essence, you can argue that we lost not only

one water supply, but quite honestly, we lost two plus water supplies in this process.”

Ledford believes a path toward shoring up the city’s water supply will come through working with neighboring communities.

The Crittenden-Livingston Co. Water District was supposed to serve as Marion’s third option for a water source, but the district is unable to do so because of how the system’s demand has increased in recent years. Ledford says one possible solution is for the city of Princeton’s water system to supply additional water to the Caldwell County system, which could then alleviate strain on the Crittenden-Livingston system and allow it to aid the one in Marion. Another possibility is that the water provider in Webster County supplies some of Crittenden-Livingston’s demand. Other potential options included the pumping of raw water from the Ohio and Cumberland rivers into City Lake for processing by the National Guard.

A release late Tuesday indicated Marion officials made progress during meetings with regional partners, including the idea of the Union County community of Sturgis being a possible water source. It also said Webster County “is working on expanding their maximum coverage to be able to provide [Marion] with as much water as possible,” and engineering and testing will yield more information next week. The release also said Caldwell County was finalizing engineering plans to possibly begin testing water flow but that more information will come next week.

Ledford thinks these programs could provide Marion with 40-70% of its daily water usage. Though the city administrator said getting water from third parties will come at an additional cost for the system, the city does not have “a full understanding of what this might mean for [residents’] water bills.”

“At this time, our focus in those of the engineering teams are more directed towards the immediate emergency needs to get the water,” Ledford said.

Gov. Andy Beshear declared a state of emergency for the community Saturday, promising to aid the community in dealing with the crisis.

“The number one priority of government is to keep our people safe,” Beshear said [in a release](#). “Today’s action of declaring a state of emergency for the City of Marion is intended to put into motion all the things we, the state, can do to help alleviate the situation and provide support.”

[After the declaration](#), Kentucky Emergency Management officials began coordinating a response and relief activities alongside local officials and the Kentucky National Guard mobilized personnel and equipment.

Part of the city’s response to the water shortage has been the launch of a “robust” water conservation campaign, advising customers to only use water for “essential purposes” like hygiene and consumption.

“With the limited amount of water supply we now have in our possession, it was imperative that the city get very serious about water restrictions in order to conserve as much water as possible,” Ledford said. “You might think that what you do at your house doesn't make a difference, but if everyone is making their effort...it does make a difference.”

Marion business owner and Crittenden County Chamber of Commerce president Shanna West says the preservation of the water supply is a priority for local businesses and residents.

West said while there was initially some panic around the subject, some residents have developed a sense of “hesitant optimism” with regards to the shortage as the community works to solve the issue together.

“A lot of us are learning a really valuable lesson in conservation, where we have taken unlimited water for granted for so long,” she said. “That's become one of the most important main conversations I've been hearing.”

The city has been stockpiling water to distribute to customers in this eventuality. National Guard members and local partners will be [giving out water throughout this week at the Armory in Marion](#), located at 131 Rochester Avenue.

Distribution of water will be done by last name beginning tomorrow and running through early next week. City residents will need to bring a driver's license to pick up water, which the city asks be used for drinking and cooking.

The schedule is as follows:

- June 23, last names beginning with A through G
- June 24, last names beginning with H through L
- June 25, last names beginning with M through R
- June 26, last names beginning with S through Z

All water distribution will take place from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. For any special arrangements due to health or transportation issues, city residents are advised to contact City Hall at 270-965-2266.