

About Watts Bar Reservoir

Watts Bar Dam, located about midway between Knoxville and Chattanooga, is one of nine TVA dams on the Tennessee River. The reservoir is popular for boating, fishing, swimming, camping, and other outdoor activities. A scenic overlook near the dam provides visitors with a panoramic view of the reservoir and surrounding countryside.

Before TVA created Watts Bar and other reservoirs above Chattanooga, the city had one of the most serious flooding problems in the nation. Now the river that often threatened the city contributes to its economy as a major artery for barge traffic.

Watts Bar Reservoir Facts & Figures

Construction of Watts Bar Dam began in 1939. It was completed in January 1942, three weeks after Pearl Harbor, and provided urgently needed electricity for the war effort.

The dam is 112 feet high and stretches 2,960 feet across the Tennessee River.

Watts Bar Dam is a hydroelectric facility. It has five generating units with a net dependable capacity of 182 megawatts. Net dependable capacity is the amount of power a dam can produce on an average day, minus the electricity used by the dam itself.

Watts Bar Reservoir has 722 miles of shoreline and over 39,090 acres of water surface.

The reservoir has a flood-storage capacity of 379,000 acre-feet.

To maintain the water depth required for navigation, the minimum winter elevation for Watts Bar Reservoir is 735 feet. The typical summer operating range is between 740 and 741 feet.

In addition to forming a navigable 72-mile-long reservoir on the Tennessee River, Watts Bar also creates a slack-water channel for navigation more than 20 miles up the Clinch River and 12 miles up the Emory River.

Watts Bar has one 60- by 360-foot lock that lifts and lowers barges as much as 70 feet to Chickamauga Reservoir. The lock handles more than a million tons of cargo a year.