

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FOR MODIFICATIONS TO THE INTERIM OPERATIONS PLAN
FOR SUPPORT OF ENDANGERED AND THREATENED SPECIES
JIM WOODRUFF DAM
GADSDEN AND JACKSON COUNTIES, FLORIDA
AND DECATUR COUNTY, GEORGIA**

1. PROPOSED ACTION: The proposed action consists of modifications to the Interim Operations Plan (IOP) for Jim Woodruff Dam to provide a higher minimum flow to the Apalachicola River when reservoir storage and hydrologic conditions permit in support of endangered and threatened species and critical habitat, as required by Reasonable and Prudent Measure Number 3 (RPM3) of the Biological Opinion (BO) issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on 5 September 2006. The proposed action represents the final IOP as proposed by the Corps, with incorporation of the RPM3 modifications approved by the USFWS in their letter dated 28 February 2007. The proposed action specifies two parameters applicable to the daily releases from Woodruff: a minimum discharge in relation to average basin inflows (daily average in cubic feet per second [cfs]) and maximum fall rate (vertical drop in river stage [ft/day]), in the same fashion as the IOP; with incorporation of a desired minimum flow (6,500cfs) and the required minimum flow (5,000 cfs), and a drought “trigger” to determine those conditions when the required minimum flow would be more prudent than the desired minimum flow. The drought trigger is based upon Composite Storage within the Apalachicola, Chattahoochee, Flint Rivers (ACF) system. Releases are based on the computed 7-day moving average basin inflow, and measured at the U.S. Geological Survey Chattahoochee, Florida gage immediately downstream of the dam. The minimum required releases in support of endangered species vary by basin inflow and by season of the year. The proposed higher minimum flows would be accomplished by reducing the thresholds for flows during the months of March through May, which would allow for more storage in the upstream reservoirs during these months, which represent the traditional refill period. The proposed action defines high, mid, and low ranges of basin inflow for operational decisions. In the high range, the releases meet at least the defined minimum discharge and any amount of basin inflow in excess of the minimum may be stored. In the mid range, releases are at least 70 percent of basin inflow, but not less than the low-range threshold, and up to 30 percent of basin inflow may be stored. In the low range no storage would occur, and releases are at least 100 percent of basin inflow, but not less than the minimum desired release of 6,500 cfs, as appropriate, or the minimum required release of 5,000 cfs, based on Composite Storage available in the system. The proposed modifications to the thresholds during the Gulf sturgeon spawning period (March-May) include basin inflow ranges defined as: high ($\geq 35,800$ cfs), mid ($\geq 18,000$ and $< 35,800$ cfs), and low ($< 18,000$ cfs). The remainder of the year (June-February) the basin inflow ranges are defined as: high ($\geq 23,000$ cfs), mid ($\geq 10,000$ and $< 23,000$ cfs), and low ($< 10,000$ cfs). The maximum fall rates vary by release ranges less than 30,000 cfs. Releases in the range of $\geq 20,000$ and $< 30,000$ cfs require a fall rate of 1.0 to 2.0 ft/day; releases in the range of $> 16,000$ and $< 20,000$ cfs require a fall rate of 0.5 to 1.0 ft/day; releases in the range of $> 8,000$ and $\leq 16,000$ cfs require a fall rate of 0.25 to 0.5 ft/day; and releases less than 8,000 cfs require a fall rate of 0.25 ft/day or less. The proposed operations and thresholds during March through May are intended to support Gulf sturgeon spawning activities. The 18,000 cfs minimum release is also based on evaluation of spawning and rearing needs for the host fish necessary for mussel reproduction. The proposed operations during June through February are intended to support the protected mussels, host fish for mussels, and young sturgeon.

2. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

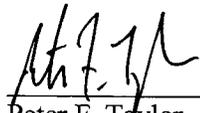
a. "No Action" Alternative. This alternative would represent water control operations at Jim Woodruff Dam without implementation of the modifications to the IOP. This alternative consists of the current water control operations at Jim Woodruff Dam (i.e., under the provisions of the final IOP as described in the September 7, 2006, letter from the Corps to the USFWS which incorporated the requirements of RPM2 of the BO).

b. Other Alternatives Considered During Section 7 Consultation. During the development of a plan that meets the intents of RPM3, the Mobile District evaluated several other plans (Concepts 1 – 4), as well as, recommendations from other stakeholders within the basin. However, it was determined that these alternatives failed to effectively meet the intents of RPM3, or would require a change to the existing Water Control Plan. Therefore, these alternatives as a whole were removed from further consideration. However, certain elements in the previous Concepts and other stakeholders' recommendations were incorporated into the Concept 5 proposal where they would assist in meeting the requirements of RPM3 and could be implemented under the constraints of the existing water control plan. A summary of these alternatives is provided in the attached Environmental Assessment (EA).

3. **FACTORS CONSIDERED IN DETERMINING THAT NO ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT IS REQUIRED:** As described in the attached EA, the proposed action will not significantly impact resources in the project area. Resource areas considered in the impacts analysis include physical habitat, land use changes, historic and archaeological resources, fishery and wildlife resources, essential fish habitat, threatened and endangered species, recreation, hydrology, water quality and supply, flood control, navigation, hydropower, floodplain and wetland resources, and aesthetics. The proposed action provides some additional benefits to mussel habitat by maintaining higher minimum flows more of the time, without significantly impacting Gulf sturgeon or mussel host fish spawning activities during the spring months. The proposed action was also determined to not significantly contribute to cumulative impacts affecting these resources. The proposed action constitutes a short-term use of man's environment and does not prohibit the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity in the project area.

4. **CONCLUSIONS:** An evaluation of the Environmental Assessment describing the proposed action shows that the proposed action would have no significant environmental or human impacts. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required.

DATE: 8 March 07



Peter F. Taylor
Colonel, Corps of Engineers
District Engineer