DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
MOBILE DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS
P.O. BOX 2288
MOBILE, ALABAMA 36628-0001

May 11, 2007

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

Inland Environment Team
Planning and Environmental Division

Ms. Gail Carmody
Field Supervisor
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1601 Balboa Avenue
Panama City, Florida 32405-3721

Dear Ms. Carmody:

Your letter dated March 30, 2007 extended the due date until August 30, 2007 for implementation of certain activities required by the Biological Opinion (BO) issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for the Jim Woodruff Dam Interim Operation Plan; in particular those activities required under reasonable and prudent measure (RPM) 4 and RPM5. The extension was requested due to a delay in receiving fiscal year 2007 funds in U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), Mobile District, which are necessary to allow the award of the contractual agreements to perform the necessary work. Sufficient funding has now been received by Mobile District to allow us to proceed with the required activities. By this letter, I want to inform you of progress made to date toward implementation of the required RPM4 and RPM5 activities and our schedule for complying with remaining requirements of these RPMs.

RPM4 requires an evaluation of the sediment dynamics and channel morphology trends on the Apalachicola River in order to improve our understanding of dynamic conditions and monitor the zone at which take may occur, and to identify possible alternatives to minimize effects to listed mussels in vulnerable locations. The terms and conditions of the BO specify that Mobile District and USFWS will consult with experts, jointly identified by both agencies, to assist in identifying the current status of sediment transport and channel stability in the Apalachicola River as it relates to the distribution of listed mussels and their vulnerability to low-flow conditions. The goals of the evaluation are to identify: 1) feasible water and/or habitat management actions that would minimize listed mussel mortality; 2) current patterns and trends in morphological changes; and 3) additional information needed, if any, to predict morphological changes that may affect the listed mussels. This evaluation is to be based on available information and tools and best professional judgment. As a result of previous discussions at our October 2006 and March 2007 semi-annual meetings, we have identified three possible specialists with specific river sediment transport and morphology expertise (one river geomorphologist from Department of Interior (DOI), one sediment transport specialist formerly from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Research Development Center (ERDC), and one renowned geomorphologist from the private sector). On April 9, Mobile District and USFWS

conducted a teleconference with the potential specialists to determine their availability and willingness to assist in this effort, and to outline the evaluation goals and expectations. Following the teleconference, specific background information was provided to the river specialists to familiarize them with the Apalachicola River. We are currently drafting a scope of work for award of a task order to fund efforts by two of the specialists. It is our understanding that USFWS will fund participation of the DOI specialist. We anticipate holding an initial meeting with the river specialists this June, to include a field visit to the Apalachicola River, with mussel specialists to assist in identifying mussel requirements and potentially vulnerable areas. A follow-on workshop is planned for July, at which time the individual river specialists will share with both our agencies their observations regarding changes in the river sedimentation and morphology, and opinions regarding any patterns or trends in these processes. The Corps will prepare a report, in coordination with the USFWS, summarizing our conclusions and recommendations. This summary report is scheduled to be completed by the end of August 2007.

RPM5 requires monitoring of the level of take associated with the IOP and the evaluation of ways to minimize take by studying the distribution and abundance of the listed mussels in the action area. Information from the monitoring of mussel distribution and degree of vulnerability over time will be used to prepare biological assessments for future consultations related to water management operations. The goals of the mussel monitoring plan are to 1) periodically estimate total abundance of listed mussels in the action area; and 2) determine the fraction of the population that is located in habitats that are vulnerable to low-flow impacts. Mobile District has initiated discussions with mussel specialists in our ERDC to assist in development of a long-term mussel monitoring plan. As discussed in our March 1, 2007 semi-annual meeting, we intend to integrate the efforts for development of this plan with the observations and evaluations presented by the above sediment/morphology river specialists. Therefore, the mussel specialists will be included in the river specialists field inspection and follow-on workshop. Your letter extending the due date for development of the mussel monitoring plan requested that additional mussel sampling of the distribution of mussels in potentially vulnerable areas be conducted this spring or summer, and that information be used to assist in developing a more comprehensive monitoring plan. We have incorporated the requested sampling into a draft Scope of Work which was coordinated with Mr. Jerry Ziewitz of your staff and approved in mid-April. We intend to initiate the mussel sampling field work before the end of May and plan to submit a long-term mussel monitoring plan in August 2007.

We believe the above accomplishments and schedule of activities demonstrates that we are working toward implementation of the required activities under RPM4 and RPM5 as expeditiously as practicable, given the funding constraints we have experienced this fiscal year. We plan to continue to work closely with your staff as we develop the additional information that will assist in improving our water management operations and minimizing impact to the listed species.

If you have any additional questions or comments regarding our scope of effort or schedule of activities, please feel free to contact Ms. Joanne Brandt, Senior Environmental Specialist, Inland Environment Team, (251) 690-3260, or email at joanne.u.brandt@sam.usace.army.mil.

Sincerely,

Curtis M. Flakes
Chief, Planning and Environmental
Division