

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
GEORGIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION DIVISION PROPOSAL FOR A
TEMPORARY REDUCED MINIMUM WATER QUALITY FLOW IN THE
CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVER AT PEACHTREE CREEK FOR DROUGHT CONTINGENCY
WATER MANAGEMENT OPERATION IN THE ACF RIVER BASIN AND TEMPORARY
WAIVER FROM ACF WATER CONTROL PLAN

1. PROPOSED ACTION:

The proposed action was initiated in the form of a letter dated 11 February 2008 addressed to the Corps Mobile District Commander Colonel Byron Jorns, from Dr. Carol Couch, Director, EPD. The letter stated that in order to preserve valuable storage in Lake Lanier for future use during this exceptional drought, the EPD had evaluated the use of a lower minimum flow of the Chattahoochee River at Peachtree Creek. Their request proposed a reduction in minimum flow measured at Peachtree Creek from an instantaneous daily value of 750 cubic feet per second (cfs) to 550 cfs beginning immediately and continuing until 30 April 2008. The EPD further proposed to use an adaptive management approach regarding the minimum flow as actual water quality data is collected and as other actual data and information become clear. During discussions following receipt of the letter, the Corps notified EPD staff that additional steps may be required to implement releases that result in flows below 650 cfs at Atlanta due to language in the project authorization contained in House Document 300 (reference paragraph 80). Therefore, by letter dated 3 March 2008, Dr. Couch requested that flows in the Chattahoochee River, as measured at the confluence of Peachtree Creek, be immediately reduced to 650 cfs at a minimum until 30 April 2008.

2. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

1. "No Action" Alternative (Alternative 1)

The CEQ regulations require analysis of the "no action" alternative 40 C.F.R. § 1502.14. Based on the nature of the proposed action, "no action" represents "no change" from the current water management practices at Buford Dam, and no change from the existing minimum flow requirements described in the Apalachicola Basin Reservoir Regulation Manual-Appendix B - Buford Dam (1991) would be made. Therefore, under the "no action" alternative, the Corps would continue to make releases from Buford Dam in order to meet the 750 cfs instantaneous minimum daily flow value at Peachtree Creek. This alternative fails to take advantage of the cool weather months allowing for a reduction on the demand of valuable stored water in Lake Lanier. Therefore, additional alternatives were considered.

2. Maintain 550 cfs Minimum Flow at Peachtree Creek (Alternative 2)

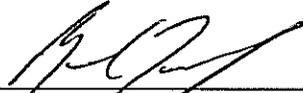
This alternative represents the original proposal by EPD and is similar to the recommended plan, with the exception of maintaining a 550 cfs instantaneous minimum daily flow value at Peachtree Creek between now and 30 April 2008. The impact analysis suggests that this alternative may provide additional benefits to storage at Lake Lanier, without significantly

impacting downstream resources. However, House Document 300 – adopted by Congress on the basis of project authorization – provided that the project release “varying flows up to a maximum of 600 second-feet... from Buford so as to insure at all times a flow at Atlanta not less than 650 second-feet” (H.D. 300, p 34, par. 80). Due to the apparent need for additional studies and coordination to reduce the minimum flow values at Peachtree Creek below 650 cfs and the likelihood that these studies would prevent implementation of the reduced minimum flow for any significant period between now and 30 April 2008, EPD requested that flows in the Chattahoochee River, as measured at the confluence of Peachtree Creek, be immediately reduced to 650 cfs at a minimum until 30 April 2008. The Corps concurs that alternatives requiring additional authorization may result in an inability to realize all the potential storage benefits of reducing the minimum flow requirement immediately. Therefore, this alternative was not carried forward for further consideration.

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 is intended to preserve storage in Lake Lanier by making allowances for increased storage opportunities and/or reductions in the demand of storage in order to provide continued support to project purposes; minimize impacts to municipal and industrial water supply, water quality, and fish and wildlife conservation; and provide greater assurance of future sustained flows for species and other users during a severe multi-year drought, currently being experienced in the ACF basin. 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 action would have no long term significant environmental or human impacts. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required.

DATE: 12 Mar 2008



Byron G. Jorns
Colonel, Corps of Engineers
District Commander