

Enclosure 12

Memorandum for Record
Annual Fish Management Coordination Meeting
20 February 2003

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: Proposed Update/Revision to SAM SOP 1130-2-9, Lake Regulation and Coordination for Fish Management Purposes – Interagency Meeting on 20 February 2003

1. On 20 February, representatives of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers met at the Lake Seminole Resource Management Office with representatives of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State fish management agencies from Georgia and Florida for further discussions related to the proposed update and revision of the current SOP for reservoir operations during fish spawn periods. Representative from the Alabama fish management agency were also invited, but were apparently unable to attend. The focus of previous discussions was to consider the inclusion of management of reservoir operations to minimize fish spawning impacts on the Apalachicola River. It was also recommended that set fish spawn periods be established for each project area, which would consider a number of fish species other than just large-mouth bass, which was the management target species for the current SOP. It had also been proposed to discontinue temperature monitoring for determining when fish spawn begins. A revised draft Strawman SOP (attached) was circulated to the agencies for review prior to this meeting, which incorporated language related to the above recommendations, along with comparison of previous spawning operations periods determined by temperature monitoring with the proposed spawning periods (attached). Also attached is an updated copy of the Agency Point of Contract list for coordination during the fish spawn season, which incorporates POCs for Lake Okatibbee in addition to Allatoona Lake and the ACF projects. The following representatives were present and participated in the meeting discussions.

Jerry Ziewitz	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Rick Long	Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC)
Ted Hoehn	FWCC
Charlie Mesing	FWCC
Rob Weller	Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources (GDNR), WRD, Albany
Russ Ober	GDNR, WRD, Albany
Brent Hess	GDNR, West Point Lake
Les Brusse	USACE, Lake Seminole
Don Morgan	USACE, Lake Seminole
Tim Rainey	USACE, Mobile District, OP-TR
Ken Day	USACE, Mobile District, OP-TR
Memphis Vaughan	USACE, Mobile District, EN-HW
Joanne Brandt	USACE, Mobile District, PD-EI

2. Ted Hoehn expressed concern that the 4 to 6 weeks of fish spawn operations referenced in the SOP was not long enough to provide for successful spawning for a number of species in the river. Joanne explained that the 4 to 6 weeks was consistent with the guidance of the South Atlantic Division (SAD) regulation (DR 1130-2-16). That would be the extent of time for which

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the Mobile District would be committed to maintain stable conditions on the reservoir and/or river in most years. It would not be possible to include the river and also maintain stable conditions on each of the reservoirs for the entire 8 week periods suggested by the agencies, unless water is plentiful throughout the basin and no flood pulses occur, etc. However, the SOP describes a coordination protocol for consideration of fish management operations for the entire proposed fish spawn period, and Mobile District would coordinate with the State POCs to determine if alternative operations could be conducted that would minimize fishery impacts for the remaining period.

3. Jerry Ziewitz noted that it was unrealistic to expect the water operators to be able to maintain a stable elevation on the Apalachicola River for the proposed 1 April to 1 June spawning period, since the normal hydrological conditions during that period would be a gradual decline in river stages due to reduced inflows into the basin. The main concern from a fishery management perspective would be to avoid any precipitous drop in river stages during that period. FWCC agreed that a gradual decline, with no drop greater than 6 inches per day, would be acceptable to them. Jerry agreed to draft alternative language that would provide for a gradual decline and no drop greater than 6 inches – language would be related to natural inflows and greater drop may be experienced if low inflow are experienced and reservoirs are also declining. The proposed alternate language would reference that reservoir storage during the spawning period would be increased only when river flows can also be met. Jerry also noted that dips in river elevation toward the end of the spawning period are more damaging than earlier in the period, due to more established spawning for more species later in the season. Joanne expressed concern whether the proposed later spawning period (1 April – 1 June) would be inconsistent with efforts to manage flows for Gulf sturgeon which would spawn from early March through early April. He indicated that there are generally higher flows in March when the sturgeon begins spawning, and that gradually declining stages in April should not be harmful to the Gulf sturgeon spawning. Joanne indicated that the Corps would prepare some form of documentation of informal consultation regarding anticipated impacts to the sturgeon to satisfy Section 7 consultation requirements.

4. Joanne asked if the proposed dates for the spawning period at Allatoona Lake (15 March – 15 May) should be re-evaluated in light of the review of the historic periods for fish management determined by temperature monitoring. Review of the temperature data showed that spawning operations historically began in early to mid-April and extended until late May to early June. Russ Ober agreed to check with their field biologist on the appropriate dates for a proposed spawning period for Allatoona Lake. (Note: In follow-on communications Russ confirmed the 15 March – 15 May dates, but noted if only a 6 week period could be obtained, then the project should be operated to maintain stable conditions during the period 21 Mar – 7 May. The Georgia fishery biologists are primarily interested in enhancing the crappie spawn, which occurs prior to the bass spawn.)

5. Possible fish spawn operations during spring of 2003 were also discussed. Both West Point Lake and Apalachicola River proposed fish spawn periods would run during 1 April – 1 June. Walter F. George fish spawn period would run 15 Mar – 15 May. If water is in short supply this spring, it is likely that water from Walter F. George would have to be released to support fish

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spawning activities on the Apalachicola River. GDNR agreed that up to a 1 foot drop could be experienced this year on Walter F. George Lake, if necessary, to support flows on the river. This option would be coordinated in advance with the State fishery biologists in order to attempt to minimize impacts throughout the basin.

6. It was agreed to circulate another draft Strawman proposal that would incorporate alternative language specifying operations that would provide for stable or gradually declining stages on the Apalachicola River. USFWS will provide proposed alternate language. It was also generally agreed that fish management operations consistent with the draft Strawman SOP would be conducted on a demonstration basis for this year to see how effectively the proposed protocol worked. We would operate this year under the auspices of an alternate annual plan, which is provided for in the Division Regulation (DR 1130-2-16). The proposed revision to the SOP would likely be formally approved at a later date. Joanne noted that SAD was considering a modification to the division regulation that would be consistent with our proposal to institute established fish spawn periods in place of those established via temperature monitoring. In the meantime, we will continue to collect temperature data this year.

7. On a related matter, FWCC requested if the Mobile District could consider altering spillgate operations at Jim Woodruff Dam to provide for opening of gates near the powerhouse during peak fishing periods of April – May. Don Morgan agreed to check into this possibility and requested the FWCC coordinate directly with him on this matter. Also, Russ Ober expressed concern that the fishing pier and other fishing access areas immediately below Walter F. George had been closed off due to security reasons since 11 Sept 01. He asked if there could be consideration to increasing limited access to these fishing areas. He was advised that security at the Corps facilities was still a high priority, and it was unlikely that it would be relaxed in the near future.

JOANNE BRANDT
Compliance Manager
Inland Environment Team

Enclosures

1. Draft Strawman proposal with edits
2. Temperature monitoring data vs. proposed spawning periods
3. Updated POC list

Copies Furnished:

USFWS/Carmody/Ziewitz/Jenkins/Goldman/Tucker/Palmer/Aycock/Sinclair/
GDNR/Ober/Weller/Hess/Probst/Weaver/Durniak/Ager/Evans/Partridge/
FWCC/Hoehn/Mesing/Long/Estes/Yeager
ADCNR/Hornsby/McHugh/Rider/Newman/Nichols

CESAM-PD-EI

3 March 2003

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MDWFP/Holman

CESAM-OP-T/Anderson

CESAM-OP-TR/Day/Rainey

CESAM-OP-TN/Bradley/Dyess

CESAM-OP-TH/Cromartie

CESAM-OP-GE/Jangula

CESAM-OP-OL/Huntley

CESAM-OP-AL/Petersen

CESAM-OP-SL/Topper/Taylor

CESAM-OP-WP/Sosebee/Treherne/Chitwood

CESAM-OP-AC/Earnest

CESAM-OP-AC-WFG/Puhr

CESAM-OP-AC-LS/Brusse/Bond/Morgan

CESAM-EN-HW/Vaughan/Morisani

CESAM-PD-E/McClellan

CESAM-PD-EI/Findley/Peck/Eubanks

CESAD-CM-OC/Davis

CESAD-DM-PE/Mauldin