

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
FOR 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 is the Corps' Interim Operations Plan (IOP) for Jim Woodruff Dam, which describes minimum releases and maximum fall rates for releases from the dam to the Apalachicola River in order to minimize or avoid adverse impacts or provide support to endangered and threatened species and critical habitat which occur on the Apalachicola River. The IOP was included in a request to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) dated March 7, 2006 to initiate formal consultation on the impacts of existing operations at Jim Woodruff Dam and releases to the Apalachicola River on endangered and threatened species and critical habitat, pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. The IOP 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 measured in feet/day). Releases are based on the computed 7-day moving average basin inflow, and measured at the Chattahoochee gage immediately downstream of the dam. The minimum releases vary by basin inflow and by season of the year. The IOP 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, releases are at least 100 percent of basin inflow, but not less than 5,000 cfs, and no storage may occur. During the Gulf sturgeon spawning period (March-May) the basin inflow ranges are defined as: high ( $\geq 37,400$  cfs), mid ( $\geq 20,400$  and  $< 37,400$  cfs), and low ( $< 20,400$  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.

2. **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:**

a. "No Action" Alternative. This alternative would represent water control operations at Jim Woodruff Dam without implementation of the IOP. The low flow operation protocols implemented at Jim Woodruff Dam in 2004 and 2005 were selected as most representative of Jim Woodruff Dam operations in the absence of the IOP. The low flow operations protocols were also developed in order to minimize or avoid adverse impacts or provide support to endangered and threatened species and critical habitat which occur on the Apalachicola River.

The low flow operation protocols required that releases from Jim Woodruff Dam would meet or exceed basin inflows whenever basin inflows fell to 20,000 cfs or lower during the spring Gulf sturgeon spawning months (typically March-May). Ramping rates of 0.5 ft per day or less would be imposed whenever flows fell to 16,000 cfs or lower. When flows were between 16,000 cfs and 20,000 cfs, ramping rates between 0.5 ft and 1.0 ft/day would be imposed. A similar low flow operations protocol would be implemented whenever flows approached 8,000 cfs (June-February) or lower in order to protect mussels from exposure, with releases then matched to basin inflows or greater. No additional restrictions on storage were imposed. It should be noted that a 3-day moving average of daily basin inflow calculation was used to implement decisions under the low flow operations protocols and to determine the minimum daily release from Jim Woodruff Dam during this period.

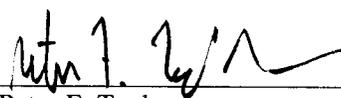
b. Other Alternatives Considered During Section 7 Consultation. It should be noted that the initially proposed IOP included the 3-day average for managing releases to basin inflow as opposed to a 7-day average, an upper flow threshold of 37,400 cfs, and a lower flow threshold of 8,000 cfs for months of June through February. An adjusted IOP included the proposed change to a 7-day average basin inflow and volumetric computations of inflows and releases, and a lower upper flow threshold of 23,000 cfs for June through February. Following completion of formal consultation, USFWS also imposed the RPM2 recommendation to adjust the lower flow threshold for June through February from 8,000 cfs to 10,000 cfs. These alternatives were recommended to facilitate operations and to minimize take of listed species, and have been incorporated in to the final IOP which represents the recommended plan.

3. **FACTORS CONSIDERED IN DETERMINING THAT NO ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT IS REQUIRED:** As described in the attached Environmental Assessment (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 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: \_\_\_\_\_

10/9/06



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