

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

1. **PROPOSED ACTION:** The proposed action is a modification of the current Interim Operations Plan (IOP) for Jim Woodruff Dam and represents the final modified IOP as proposed by the Corps and approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in the 1 June 2008 Biological Opinion. The proposed action does not represent a new Water Control Plan for Jim Woodruff Dam or a new Master Operating Manual for the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin (ACF). The IOP is a definition of temporary discretionary operations within the limits and rule curves established by the existing water control plan (1989) for Jim Woodruff Dam. The IOP 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 the threatened Gulf sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrinchus desotoi*) and critical habitat for the Gulf sturgeon; the endangered fat threeridge mussel (*Amblema neislerii*); the threatened purple bankclimber mussel (*Elliptioideus sloatianus*); and the threatened Chipola slabshell mussel (*Eliptio chipolaensis*). The proposed action was developed based upon review of the current species information, basin stakeholder input, lessons learned from 2006-07, and continuing discussions between the Corps and USFWS. The proposed modifications to the current IOP are intended to support listed species and their critical habitat in the Apalachicola River and avoid or minimize potential adverse impacts associated with discretionary operations at Jim Woodruff Dam. The proposed action addresses additional needs realized throughout our previous consultations on the IOP and its implementation by incorporating a drought contingency plan that allows for additional storage conservation and system recovery during periods of extreme drought; and providing additional opportunities to conserve storage as we enter and exit drought conditions while still providing support for listed species and their critical habitat in the Apalachicola River. The drought plan incorporated into the proposed action would require a temporary waiver from the existing water control plan to provide for minimum releases less than 5,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) from Jim Woodruff Dam when the appropriate trigger is met and would also include provisions to allow temporary storage above the winter pool rule curve at the Walter F. George and West Point projects if the opportunity presents itself and/or begin spring refill operations at an earlier date in order to provide additional conservation storage for future needs.

Like the current IOP, the proposed action specifies two parameters applicable to the daily releases from Jim Woodruff Dam: a minimum discharge and a maximum fall rate. Also like the current IOP, the proposed action places limitations on refill, but does not require a net drawdown of composite storage unless basin inflow is less than 5,000 cfs. However, the proposed action modifies how the minimum discharge is determined and identifies conditions under which maintenance of the maximum fall rate schedule is suspended and more conservative drought contingency operations begin. The proposed action does not change the current IOP basin inflow calculation (7-day moving average daily basin inflow), use of Chattahoochee gage to measure releases/river flow, use of volumetric balancing as described in the 16 May 2007 letter to the USFWS, nor the limited hydropower peaking operations at Jim Woodruff Dam. A detailed description of the proposed action

and how it modifies the current IOP is provided in the supplemental Environmental Assessment (EA) attached.

Operations under the proposed action will be implemented and continued until such time as additional formal consultation may again be initiated and completed, either in association with the update and revision of water control manuals for the ACF system, or sooner if conditions change or additional information is developed to justify a possible revision to operations.

2. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

a. “No Action” Alternative. This alternative would represent the current IOP water control operations at Jim Woodruff Dam as described in the 23 March 2007 letter to USFWS since the previously approved temporary Exceptional Drought Operations (EDO) modification of the IOP incidental take statement expires on 1 June 2008. This alternative is not feasible given the impact the drought has had and continues to have on the composite storage. This alternative was deemed not a fair balance between providing more opportunities to conserve storage for future augmentation flows and continued flow support to threatened and endangered species and the multiple project purposes in the basin. Therefore, additional alternatives were considered.

b. Lower Drought Zone Trigger – This alternative represents the proposed modifications to the current IOP with the exception of a lower Drought Zone trigger. The lower Drought Zone trigger to allow discharges less than 5,000 cfs does not provide sufficient opportunity to conserve storage until system storage has been considerably compromised. Therefore, additional alternatives were considered.

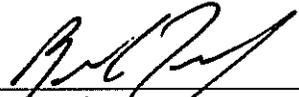
c. Incorporate EDO into Current IOP– This alternative consists of incorporating the provisions of the temporary EDO modifications into the current IOP as a drought contingency plan. Although, this alternative does address one of the issues identified for the IOP, the need for some form of drought plan, it does not address the need to provide additional opportunities to conserve storage as we enter and exit drought conditions. Furthermore, this alternative would result in an increase in the number of days that flows were less than 5,000 cfs as compared to the recommended plan since the EDO provides for releases as low as 4,750 cfs when composite storage is below the top of Zone 4. Therefore, this alternative was not carried forward for further consideration.

d. Continue EDO operations – This alternative would include continuing to operate under the provisions of the EDO. The Endangered Species Act (ESA) authorizations for incidental take for the EDO plan expire on 1 June 2008. Without additional USFWS authorization, reductions in minimum discharges to the Apalachicola River below 5,000 cfs are not authorized. The current IOP does not include the EDO or any other extreme drought contingency plan. Since we are still experiencing drought conditions throughout much of the ACF basin and in light of the current composite storage level (Zone 4) and the more restrictive provisions of the current IOP regarding storage conservation, we determined that the system had not recovered to a level capable of supporting the current IOP. During informal consultation with USFWS regarding operations after 1 June 2008 it was agreed that additional modifications to the IOP or EDO that reduced the magnitude and duration of flows less than 5,000 cfs in the Apalachicola River should be considered in order to minimize impacts to listed species while still supporting other authorized project purposes in the basin. 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 supplemental 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. Coordination with Federal and State agencies has been completed, to include consultation with USFWS, coordination with the States of Alabama, Florida and Georgia, and coordination with interested stakeholders within the basin.

4. CONCLUSIONS: An evaluation of the supplemental 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.

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