REVISED INTERIM OPERATIONS PLAN
Q&As

1. What is the Revised Interim Operations Plan?

A. The RIOP is intended to govern the releases from Woodruff Dam until revised or replaced with a new Water Control Plan. The RIOP was formulated to address protection of endangered and threatened species and critical habitat in the Apalachicola River, manage reservoir storage for other project purposes, and meet drought contingencies.

2. Why did the Corps submit a modification to the Interim Operations Plan to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)?

A. The current Exceptional Drought Operations (EDO) plan expired on June 1, 2008 for the Endangered Species Act authorizations for incidental take. Without additional USFWS authorization, reductions in minimum discharges to the Apalachicola River 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, the Corps has submitted a modification to the previous Interim Operations Plan (IOP) that incorporates a drought contingency plan among other modifications.

3. Would the RIOP change Corps operations at other projects?

A. No, Except for the temporary deviation of winter drawdown requirements at the West Point and W.F. George projects during drought conditions, the Corps would implement the RIOP within the boundaries of the existing water control plans for the upstream reservoir projects, and would not change the top of the flood control pools, conservation pools, or the rule curves of the upstream projects.

4. Is the RIOP a new Water Control Plan (WCP) for Woodruff Dam?

A. The RIOP is not a revised water control plan for Jim Woodruff Dam; it is a definition of operations within the limits established by the existing water control plan, which describes releases from Jim Woodruff Dam to the Apalachicola River. Certain drought provisions of the proposed action require temporary deviation 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 specific triggers are met. The RIOP was formulated specifically to address endangered and threatened species and critical habitat in the Apalachicola River and is considered interim operational guidance while the Corps begins the procedure to update its Water Control Manuals/Plans for the ACF system.

5. What major differences are in the RIOP today?

A. The major differences for the RIOP include:

1) Incorporating a drought contingency plan that allows for additional storage conservation and system recovery during periods of extreme drought, and

2) 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. This is accomplished in part by reducing limitations on refill by allowing the ability to store 50 percent of the basin inflows as compared to 30 percent; and adding additional seasonal and composite storage considerations into the minimum release schedule

3) Opportunity to storage all basin inflow greater than 5,000 cfs in the winter season (December to February).

4) Indentify a trigger to reduce the Jim Woodruff minimum release from 5,000 to 4,500 cfs

5) Opportunity to release more during the Spawning period in upper zones by storing more during the Refill and Non-spawning periods

6) Reduce frequency of Jim Woodruff releases less than 5,000 cfs.

6. Does the RIOP have basin inflow thresholds or "triggers" that vary by season and provide for reduced or increased flows?

A. Yes. It includes new basin inflow thresholds and also incorporates composite storage thresholds when determining minimum releases. These thresholds also vary by season. Certain drought provisions of the proposed action require temporary deviation 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 specific triggers are met.

B. The RIOP drought plan is triggered when composite storage falls below the bottom of Zone 3 into Zone 4.

7. When is the drought provisions suspended?

A. The drought plan is effective until composite storage returns to a level above the top of Zone 3 (i.e. within Zone 2). At that time, the temporary drought plan provisions are suspended, and all other provisions of the RIOP are re-instated.

8. Why did the Corps revise the IOP?

A. Throughout the previous consultations on the IOP and its implementation, and the current extreme drought, the Corps learned that two issues needed further consideration 1) incorporation of some form of drought plan and 2) additional need for storage conservation when system storage is low. As previously stated, the EDO authorizations expired on June 1, 2008. The RIOP is based on the need to continue to operate under a drought contingency plan and to address the need for additional storage conservation as we recover from the prolonged drought. Rather than extend the EDO or develop a new EDO only, the Corps utilized the current species information, basin stakeholder input, lessons learned from 2006-07, and continuing discussions with USFWS to revise the IOP and address the issues stated above.

9. The Corps states that it operates the ACF reservoir as a system. How does this affect Woodruff Dam?

A. The Corps operates the ACF reservoirs as a system, and releases from Woodruff Dam reflect the downstream end-result of system-wide operations. The RIOP addresses specific parameters of the daily releases from Woodruff Dam into the Apalachicola River.

10. Does the RIOP address operations at the other four federal reservoirs?

A. The RIOP does not address operational specifics at the four federal reservoirs upstream of Woodruff. However temporary deviation of winter drawdown requirements at the West Point and W.F. George projects during drought conditions are part of the RIOP.

11. What are the parameters for daily releases at Woodruff?

A. Minimum discharge in relation to average basin inflows, composite storage, time of year and a maximum fall rate.

12. There were a lot of questions raised in '07 about the science to backup flow requirements for the mussels. Has the science gotten any better?

A. Yes. The Corps and USFWS have mapped all suitable endangered fat threeridge mussel habitats for the entire non-tidal influence portion of the river; they have completed several studies that looked at mussel depth distribution within representative sites in the river mile 40-50 high mussel density area; and they conducted extensive incidental take monitoring associated with the 4,750 cubic feet per second (cfs) flow reached last year to estimate how many mussels were impacted by the reduced flow. Detailed depth distribution studies and other studies will continue this year to add even more data to the science.

13. Will the RIOP have any effect on the releases from Buford Dam?

A. Currently releases from Buford are only to meet the water quality requirements and water supply requirements of Metro Atlanta.

B. Long term, Yes. The drought contingency plan allows for additional storage conservation and system recovery during periods of extreme drought. As the downstream reservoirs refill, less water from Buford Dam is released to meet the Jim Woodruff minimum required flow.

14. Is there a timeline for updating the Water Control Manuals?

A. There is no timeline for the Water Control Manuals. The Corps is still working the schedule.

15. Has any determination been made to what effects the RIOP will have on Apalachicola Bay?

A. The USFWS in their BO and the Corps analysis of the RIOP has determined there will be no changes in salinity or estuarine habitat for the Gulf sturgeon. Additional studies are being conducted to determine the effect of sturgeon use of the bay and salinity regime changes and benthic food resource responses due to possible non-project related water uses which could increase the duration of flows less than 16,000 cfs.

16. Why does the Revised Interim Operations Plan (RIOP) not include flow requirements for the middle Chattahoochee basin? By addressing only upstream and downstream flow requirements, the plan could potentially fail to provide for the flow requirements of communities and industries in the middle basin.

A. The revisions to the Interim Operations Plan do not change the flows or durations of flows in the middle Chattahoochee basin or the Corps projects (West Point and Walter F. George) in this region. Our models show that needs in the middle part of the basin will be fully met under the provisions of the RIOP. Because there is no change, this part of the basin was not specifically addressed.