Apalachicola, Chattahoochee & Flint (ACF) River Basin
Fact Sheet

What is a Drought?

A drought is a prolonged period in which there is a serious shortage or deficiency of rainfall. Signs of drought consist of hydrologic indicators such as stream flow, rainfall, reservoir storage levels, and groundwater levels. Although there are numerous theories about drought cycles, based on historic data there is no reliable method for forecasting drought.

What are Action Zones?

Action Zones have been defined for each of the three major storage projects on the ACF -- Buford, West Point and Walter F. George. They are shown on the Lake Level forecasts charts found on the Mobile District Water Management homepage at http://water.sam.usace.army.mil. These zones are used to manage the lakes at the highest level possible while balancing the needs of all the authorized purposes. Action Zone 1 is the highest in each lake, and defines a reservoir condition where all authorized project purposes should be met. As lake levels decline, Action Zones 2 through 4 define increasingly critical system water shortages, and guide the Corps in reducing flow releases as pool levels drop as a result of drier than normal or drought conditions. The action zones also provide guidance on meeting minimum hydropower needs at each project as well as determine the amount of storage available for downstream purposes such as flood control, hydropower, navigation, water supply, water quality, and recreation.

These zones were derived based on the past operation of the projects which considered time-of-year, historical pool level/release relationships, operational limits for conservation and recreational resource impact levels. The action zones are basic guidelines for operating the river system; however there may be other factors and activities that may cause the lakes to operate differently than the zones shown on the charts on the Water Management homepage. Some of these factors range from flood control actions, fish spawn operations, maintenance and repair of turbines, emergency situations such as a drowning and chemical spills, draw downs due to shoreline maintenance, releases made to free stuck barges, and other circumstances.

The storage projects are operated to maintain their lake level in the same zones concurrently. However, due to the hydrologic and physical characteristics of the river system and factors mentioned above, there may be brief periods when one lake is in a lower zone than the other. If this occurs, efforts are made to bring the lakes back in balance with each other as soon as conditions allow. By doing this, impacts to the river basin are shared equitably among the projects.

Zone Definitions

- Zone 1 indicates that releases can be made in support of seasonal navigation (when the channel has been adequately maintained), hydropower releases, and water

supply, and water quality releases. If the all lakes are in Zone 1 or above, the river system would operate in a fairly normal manner.

- Zone 2 indicates that water to support seasonal navigation may be limited. Hydropower generation is supported at a reduced level. Water supply and water quality releases are met. Minimum flow targets are met.

- Zone 3 indicates that water to support seasonal navigation may be significantly limited. Hydropower generation is supported at a reduced level. Water supply and water quality releases are met. Minimum flow targets are met.

- Zone 4 indicates that navigation is not supported. Hydropower demands will be met at minimum level and may only occur for concurrent uses. Water supply and water quality releases are met. Minimum flow targets are met.

Please visit the Mobile District website at www.sam.usace.army.mil to stay informed of Water Management and other Corps activities.