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Mobile District

News Release

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ACF Drought Conditions and Lake Lanier Water Storage for Water Supply

Water flow and reservoir level conditions in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint river basin in Georgia, Alabama, and Florida are very severe as the region continues in the worst drought on record for the basin. The record low level at Lanier is 1052.8 feet above mean sea level (msl), reached on December 24, 1981. Today's Lake Lanier level is 1056.5 msl. The lake's normal usable pool is currently 53% full.

"Conditions are very serious for the river system and these reservoirs," said Brigadier General Joseph Schroedel, Division Commander for the Corps' South Atlantic Division, which oversees the system. "Water in this system supports a wide variety of purposes, including hydropower, industry, water supply, water quality and the environment," said Schroedel, "and the lack of inflow as dry weather continues means we are forced to increase releases from Lake Lanier to support downstream needs, especially water supply for LaGrange, West Point, and Columbus. Metropolitan Atlanta also draws the majority of its water downstream of the dam, not from the lake."

Engineers estimate that if we get virtually no more rain and we continue using water at the same rate, approximately 282 days of useable water supply in Lake Lanier are remaining. This includes approximately 169 days from below the normal usable pool. Access to this additional water may require modification to municipal owned withdrawal infrastructure.

Schroedel also emphasized his concern about future conditions, "I am also concerned about the time it takes to refill Lake Lanier. Even if we start

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receiving average amounts of rainfall today, the lake is not expected to reach full pool again until the spring of 2009. We all must change the way we think about and use our fresh water resources."

The Corps has already initiated consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to determine how much reduction can be achieved in releases from Lanier in support of endangered species on the Apalachicola River. However, to meet the municipal water supply needs in Metropolitan Atlanta and other cities downstream, but not necessarily all industrial needs, the minimum release rate is 1500 cubic feet per second (cfs). If the releases from Lake Lanier are dropped from today's rate of 2600 to 1500 cfs when the normal usable pool is depleted, the lake would be dry in approximately 405 days instead of 282 days.

Conservation measures to reduce the amount of water used by consumers will increase the number of total days of water available from Lake Lanier. Rainfall in the basin will also provide additional water available for use. The numbers above assume no significant rain and current usage levels.

The US Army Corps of Engineers has been working closely with all affected interests in the basin to ensure that critical water related needs are sustained through this drought. Information about lake levels and other conditions in the basin is available on the Mobile District website at www.sam.usace.army.mil.

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