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Contacts: E. Patrick Robbins 251-690-2512
Ervin.p.robbins@sam.usace.army.mil

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Lisa Coghlan 251-690-2505
lisa.a.coghlan@sam.usace.army.mil

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Corps reinitiates consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on modifications to the Interim Operations Plan at Jim Woodruff Dam

Mobile, Ala. – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Mobile District has reinitiated consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on modifications to the Interim Operations Plan (IOP) at Jim Woodruff Dam to include a drought contingency plan and 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 current Exceptional Drought Operation Plan expires on June 1, 2008,” said E. Patrick Robbins, Public Affairs Officer, Mobile District. “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 Corps has requested reinitiation of formal consultation under the Endangered Species Act on proposed modifications to the IOP at Jim Woodruff Dam. Consultation discussions between the Corps and FWS over the coming weeks may identify additional modifications that provide for further avoidance and minimization measures.”

“The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will have until June 1, 2008 to review the modified IOP and its impacts on threatened and endangered species and then issue their Biological Opinion,” Robbins said.

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The modified IOP proposal includes provisions to store additional fresh water in the basin during the winter and during drought periods while minimizing harm to the four listed species, the threatened Gulf sturgeon and three mussels, the endangered fat threeridge, the threatened purple bankclimber, and the threatened Chipola slabshell. The additional storage is then available later for continued support of the species as well as other authorized project purposes.

“The notable revisions proposed include the ability to store 50 percent of basin inflows as compared to 30 percent in the previous IOP and incorporation of a drought plan,” said Robbins. “The Corps also proposes three flow seasons versus the two in the previous plan and releases from Jim Woodruff Dam would vary based on month, basin inflow thresholds, and composite storage thresholds.”

Corps releases from Jim Woodruff and all the reservoirs in the ACF serve a number of authorized purposes in addition to the protection of the species. Any decision regarding flows in the Apalachicola River will not eliminate the requirement to continue to make releases from all the lakes to provide for water quality and water supply downstream.

The Corps proposal and supporting documents are available on the Mobile District website at <http://www.sam.usace.army.mil>