

Enclosure 17

Memorandum for Record  
Informal Consultation Telecon  
1 April 2004

## MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: Coordination of Fish Spawn Operations on the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint Rivers (ACF) system, and Measures Necessary for Protection of Gulf Sturgeon and Critical Spawning Habitat on the Apalachicola River

1. On Thursday, 1 April 2004, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District, conducted our weekly teleconference call with the Federal and State fish management agencies to coordinate our water management operations in support of fish spawning activities during the extended dry conditions being experienced this spring. We are currently experiencing one of the driest months for March on record, with average inflows for the ACF basin in March estimated at 37 percent of historical levels. Those in attendance from Mobile District included Memphis Vaughan, Cheryl Hrabovsky and Rob Erhardt (CESAM-EN-HW), Joanne Brandt (CESAM-PD-EI), and Ken Day (CESAM-OP-TR). Fish management agency representatives included Jerry Ziewitz of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Ted Hoehn and Charlie Mesing of Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Russ Ober of Georgia Department of Natural Resources was unable to join the initial teleconference call, but was contacted following the call to discuss actions that might affect Lake Seminole, Walter F. George Lake and West Point Lake.
2. Rob indicated that rainfall was received in northeast Alabama and north Georgia earlier this week, ranging between 0.4 – 1.3 inches; however no rainfall was received in the central to southern parts of the basin. It is expected to continue with dry conditions over the next 5-6 days, and cooler than normal over the next couple of days and then returning to normal temperatures for this time of year. There is a possible rain system forecast for the basin in 7-8 days.
3. Memphis and Cheryl indicated that the inflows into the basin had fallen below 10,000 cfs last week, have peaked to about 14,000 cfs after the recent rainfall, but are expected to fall back to lower inflows over the next few days. We expect that we can continue to release the 11,500 cfs over the next week and possibly up to 2 weeks, but would then have to begin gradually reducing releases to equal inflows to the system if we do not receive additional rainfall in the basin. Jerry confirmed that would be consistent with his earlier recommendations on water management actions to minimize impacts to Gulf sturgeon spawning activities on the Apalachicola River (i.e., hold at 11,500 cfs release unless inflows drop to below 11,500 cfs, and then manage releases to equal inflows to the basin). FWCC concerns were that when river stages are reduced that it be gradual. Memphis confirmed that any planned reductions in releases would be very gradual, probably in range of 500 cfs increments over several days, while monitoring inflows into the system.
4. Charlie noted that the temperatures below the dam measured earlier this week were 68° F. Optimal temperatures for Gulf sturgeon are in the range of 65° to 75° F. However, it was noted that the cooler temperatures and cooler nights have probably delayed and drawn out fish spawning this year. FWCC have been monitoring striped bass spawning and have collected few

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fish and the bass spawn has been delayed. Jerry expected the sturgeon spawning has been similarly slowed up this year due to the fluctuating temperatures. They have not been able to locate sturgeon in the coastal areas and assume that they have begun moving up river. Charlie noted that FWCC will be collecting temperatures below Jim Woodruff early next week, and will relay that information to confirm whether the temperatures are still in the range conducive to sturgeon spawning.

5. Memphis suggested that we consider a press release or other means of getting the word out about our weekly coordination meetings, efforts to conduct our water management operations in support of fish spawning, and how we have tried to minimize impacts during the extremely dry spring months. Mobile District may initiate a press release, and may have our public affairs person (Marilyn Phipps) call the agencies for interview statements for inclusion in the release. USFWS and FWCC were willing to provide statements for the release.

6. In a separate follow-on teleconference, Joanne and Cheryl contacted Russ to discuss anticipated conditions at Walter F. George Lake and Lake Seminole over the next week or so. Fish Spawning operations began at Lake Seminole on 4 March. We are just completing 4 weeks of operations and have been able to hold the lake at or above the critical elevation of 76.67 feet. Cheryl advised that in order to continue to provide the 11,500 cfs release from Jim Woodruff, Lake Seminole elevations were anticipated to fall to approximately 76.5 feet, and should be able to hold at that elevation for a while. Walter F. George is currently at 188.5 feet and is expected to be at 188.3 feet by next weekend, which is still above the critical elevation for WFG. It is understood that this is still below the 189-foot optimal elevation preferred for WFG fish spawning, but also that this is above the 188-foot rule curve for WFG for this time of year (winter pool is 188.0, and refilling occurs between 1 May and 1 June, with elevation 189 achieved around 15 May). Russ noted that the bass in Seminole were in nursery stage, but should not be affected by the proposed drawdown of Lake Seminole since there is abundant vegetation in the lake at various depths. Russ would like to consider possible holding of WFG to higher elevations in future years during the month of April to enhance fish spawning – with elevation 189 the optimal level to assure inundation of vegetation rimming the lake. We agreed to consider possible temporary actions in future years, if water conditions and forecast weather condition allow, but advised that we have serious concerns about the risks of holding the lake above the “flood control” winter pool. This is something that can be discussed during our February 2005 annual coordination meeting. Cheryl also asked whether there was any reason to delay fish spawning operations, which are scheduled to begin at West Point Lake and Lake Lanier on 1 April. Russ thought that it was still appropriate to begin but will contact Brent Hess, the POC for West Point Lake, to confirm.

7. We agreed to continue these teleconferences into next week. Our next scheduled teleconference is Thursday, 8 April, 9:00 a.m. Ted will be unavailable next week, however, Charlie or Rick Long will try to be available. Charlie agreed to provide comments by email with relevant information on temperatures, spawning progress, prior to the teleconference in case he is unavailable for the call.

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8. This memorandum provides documentation of informal consultation pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, regarding our attempts to provide for water management actions that will minimize adverse effects to the threatened Gulf sturgeon during the extended dry weather and resultant low flow conditions in the ACF basin.

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Inland Environment Team

CF:

Jerry Ziewitz/Gail Carmody/USFWS  
Ted Hoehn/Charlie Mesing/Rick Long/FWCC  
Russ Ober/David Partridge/Brent Hess/Les Ager/Reggie Weaver/Jeff Durniak/GDNR  
Chris Greene/Damon Abernethy/Jon Hornsby/Nick Nichols/Mike Newman/ADCNR  
Memphis Vaughan/Cheryl Hrabovsky/Rob Erhardt/CESAM-EN-HW  
John Anderson/CESAM-OP-T  
Ken Day/CESAM-OP-TR  
Paul Bradley/CESAM-OP-TN  
Bill Smallwood/CESAM-OP-M  
Carl Dyess/CESAM-OP-D  
Terry Jangula/CESAM-OP-GE  
Les Brusse/Don Morgan/CESAM-OP-AC-LS  
Eddie Sosebee/CESAM-OP-AC  
Ron Puhr/CESAM-OP-AC-WG  
Mike Treherne/Bob Chitwood/CESAM-OP-WP  
Erwin Topper/Pat Taylor/CESAM-OP-SL  
Janet Shelby/Marilyn Phipps/CESAM-PA  
Pat Robbins/ CESAM-DX  
Matt Lang/CESAM-PD-EI  
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