

Enclosure 18

Memorandum for Record
Informal Consultation Telecon
20 April 2004

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: Fish Spawn Coordination Teleconference, 20 April 2004

1. The following agency representatives participated in today's teleconference call:

Jerry Ziewitz, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Panama City, FL
Ted Hoehn, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Tallahassee, FL
Rick Long, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Midway, FL
Russ Ober, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Albany, GA
Memphis Vaughan, US Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District, Water Management
Rob Erhardt, US Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District, Meteorologist
Joanne Brandt, US Army Corp of Engineers, Mobile District, Planning and Environmental

2. Dry conditions continue, especially throughout the Southeast and the ACF basin. Rob Erhardt noted that there would be a D-1 (Moderate Drought) condition declared by the National Weather Service for the southeast, beginning Thursday, 22 April. There is no rainfall forecast for the ACF basin until next Monday, 26 April. That rainfall is likely to be spotty to light, less than ½ inch. Weather conditions will then turn cooler and dry for the following week. Dry conditions are expected to worsen over the next few weeks. Month of April is approximately 10 percent of normal to date.

3. Memphis noted that current inflows into the ACF basin are approximately 9300 cfs (See attached chart showing 3-day average inflows through months of March and April). We have been holding outflow from Jim Woodruff Dam (JWD) at 11,500 cfs since 15 March. Based on the current inflows and the projected dry conditions over the next couple of weeks, and possibly longer, we cannot continue to release 11,500 from JWD without substantially drawing down the upstream reservoirs. The Mobile District proposes to begin cutting back releases from JWD, beginning tomorrow (Wednesday, 21 April), by approximately 500 cfs per day (approx. ¼ foot per day drawdown on river) to a level of 9000 cfs. This would result in a drop in river stages of approximately 1-1/2 feet (from current stage of 5.0 ft to approx. 3.5 ft at Blountstown gage). This release could likely be held for approximately 2 weeks. We would continue to monitor climatic conditions and inflows into the system. In the event of no rainfall, we would likely then propose to cut back flows again to approximately 8000 cfs from JWD. Projected impacts to lake conditions due to the proposed cut-back in flows to 9000 cfs have been posted on the Mobile District Water Management website. Lake Lanier should hold steady at approximate elevation 1070 ft.; West Point Lake would be steady and slightly rising from elevation 632 ft.; Walter F. George would fall to an elevation between current elevation of 188 and elevation 187.5 ft.; and Lake Seminole would hold steady at approx. 76.5 ft. Lake Lanier would be within Zone 1; West Point Lake and Walter F. George would be in Zone 2 and close to boundary of Zone 3. The above plan is consistent with previous guidance from US Fish and Wildlife Service and our

operations over the past few weeks to match outflows from JWD to the system-wide inflows, in order to minimize impacts on the threatened Gulf sturgeon spawning activities.

4. Jerry and Rick had been on the Apalachicola River below JWD last week. Approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of the rock ledge Gulf sturgeon spawning habitat immediately below the dam was exposed, but the remainder was still submerged and would be available for spawning at 11,500 cfs flow. Some portion may still be submerged at the lower releases of 9000 cfs. Water temperatures last week were measured at 17 to 18 degrees Centigrade, which is within the optimal range for sturgeon spawning. No tagged sturgeon were detected in the upper 20 miles of the river. Also, there has been little if any sign of striped bass spawning in the upper Apalachicola River. This is consistent with observations on the upper Yellow River as well. It is suspected that the Gulf sturgeon are still congregated in staging areas downstream and have not completed their migration upstream to the spawning areas. Temperatures are suspected to be in the upper range of optimal conditions for spawning, but could fall again next week due to projected cooler weather conditions. Fluctuating temperatures and low flow conditions are apparently delaying and sustaining spawning conditions for this spring.

5. US Fish and Wildlife concurred with the above proposed water management strategy, which matches outflow to system-wide inflow and maintains stable conditions on the lakes. At this time it is understood that we are responding to climatic/hydrological conditions and the proposed reduction in releases therefore does not constitute an action triggering formal Section 7 consultation under the Endangered Species Act. We will continue to document agency discussions and proposed water management operations in response to developing drought conditions to document informal Section 7 coordination. Jerry will get back to us if any additional documentation or formal coordination of the proposed actions and agency agreement would be required.

6. Attached chart shows status of fish spawn operations within Mobile District for this spring. Our next teleconference is scheduled for late next week, Thursday, 29 April, 9:00 a.m. CDT/10:00 a.m. EDT.

JOANNE BRANDT
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Inland Environment Team