

Enclosure 4

FWS-COE letter dated October 12, 2000



IN REPLY REFER TO:

## United States Department of the Interior

### FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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October 12, 2000



Colonel David Norwood  
District Engineer  
Army Corps of Engineers  
Mobile District  
P.O. Box 2288  
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Dear Colonel Norwood:

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with Major John Bailey and several other members of the Mobile District's staff on September 26 at our Panama City office. Representatives from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Resources Division (GDNR) attended as well, and I believe our discussion was productive. The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Game and Fish Division was invited as well, but could not attend. By letter dated April 28, 2000, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) requested this meeting to discuss the environmental impacts of Federal reservoir operations in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) Basin. I am writing now to summarize the conclusions and commitments that we made at the meeting.

Most of our conversation focused on the practice of reservoir operations known as navigation windows, and on operations generally during periods of drought and low flow. We reviewed the impacts of the navigation window that occurred in April/May of this year -- in particular, the loss of threadfin shad spawning in Walter F. George reservoir, and the extensive failure of a sunfish (several species of the genus *Lepomis*) spawning effort on the Apalachicola River. District staff informed us that the Corps' South Atlantic Division (SAD) was revising the procedures governing reservoir level fluctuations during the spring to protect fish spawning. The Service, Florida, and Georgia all indicated an interest in having input to those revisions.

We discussed the possibility of the District providing a brief navigation window in November or December of this year in order for the Farley Nuclear Power Plant to receive new equipment via barge. Florida's representatives stated that their agency was opposed to any further use of navigation windows or other operations that result in an unnaturally high fall rate (drop in stage per unit time) on the Apalachicola River. The April/May navigation window this year concluded with a fall rate of about 1.0 feet per day for several days. Florida said that they were in the process of studying historic gage records for the purpose of recommending a maximum fall rate for the river, but that a fall rate of 1.0 feet per day was too rapid. District staff suggested that

navigation windows would be uncommon in the future, because providing navigable depths under current channel and regulatory conditions required too much water from reservoir storage. We also discussed the overall wisdom of a winter window if the drought persists into next year.

To address the issues of navigation windows, operations during drought, etc., the Service urged the Mobile District to begin revising its Water Control Plan for the ACF in advance or in the absence of an agreement between the states on a water allocation formula. To leave this unique system without an up-to-date water control plan another decade would be unacceptable. Major Bailey responded that such a decision would be a question to refer to higher levels of authority within the Corps, but that the District would not be opposed to initiating a new Water Control Plan.

We concluded the meeting with some specific commitments to further coordination on ACF operational issues in the near future:

- The Mobile District would formally notify the various fish and wildlife conservation agencies of the possibility for a November/December navigation window as soon as practicable.
- The FWC would share its analysis and recommendations regarding fall rates on the Apalachicola River.
- The Service would write a letter to the SAD offering to provide technical assistance on the proposed revisions to the guidance on reservoir operations.

We again thank you for the District's responsiveness to our request for a meeting. We look forward to working closely with the District in the future on the fish and wildlife issues related to reservoir operations in the ACF.

Sincerely yours,



*for*  
Gail A. Carmody  
Project Leader

cc: Joanne Brandt, Mobile District COE, AL  
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