

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
Mobile District, Corps of Engineers
P.O. Box 2288
Mobile, Alabama, 36628-0001

Project Operations
RESERVOIR REGULATION AND COORDINATION
FOR FISH MANAGEMENT PURPOSES

1. Purpose. To provide a standing operating procedure (SOP) to be followed by Mobile District staff and selected Operations Division field offices to implement South Atlantic Division Regulation DR 1130-2-16, Project Operations, Lake Regulation and Coordination for Fish Management Purposes. This SOP (1) identifies designated periods of time within which fish spawn operations will be conducted at specific projects, (2) establishes protocols for coordination between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), State fisheries personnel, and the Corps, and (3) provides for development of an annual plan for special water management operations by the Corps, in coordination with the FWS and the State fisheries agencies, that would balance impacts and benefits to both reservoir and riverine fisheries during the spring fish spawning period. This SOP is intended to benefit multiple sport fish and forage fish species having similar spawning habits.

2. Applicability. This SOP applies to the operation of Allatoona Lake, Okatibbee Lake, Lake Sidney Lanier, West Point Lake, Walter F. George Lake, Lake Seminole, and the Apalachicola River. In addition to project office staffs, technical and support staffs in the Mobile District Office have significant roles in the successful implementation of this SOP. Key offices are listed below.

Operations Division	OP-TR
Planning and Environmental Division	PD-EI
Engineering Division	EN-HW
Public Affairs Office	PA

3. References.

- a. ER 1130-2-540, Environmental Stewardship Operation and Maintenance Polices, Chapter 2, Natural Resources Stewardship.
- b. EP 1130-2-540, Environmental Stewardship Operation and Maintenance Guidance and Procedures, Chapter 2, Natural Resources Stewardship

- c. ER 1130-2-550, Recreation Operation and Maintenance Polices, Chapter 3, Project Master Plans and Operational Management Plans.
 - d. EP 1130-2-550, Recreation Operation and Maintenance Guidance and Procedures, Chapter 3, Project Master Plans and Operational Management Plans.
 - e. DR 1130-2-16, Lake Regulation and Coordination for Fish Management Purposes.
 - f. DR 1130-2-18, Preparation of Operational Management Plan at Civil Works Water Resources Projects.
 - g. Executive Order 12962, Recreational Fisheries, 7 June 1995.
4. Procedures.
- In most water years it will not be possible to hold both reservoir levels and river stages at a steady or rising level for the entire spawning period, especially when upstream reservoirs and/or the Apalachicola River spawning periods overlap. Droughts and floods within the basin also present specific water management challenges. During the spawning period applicable to each water body (paragraph 4(b)), the Corps shall operate for generally stable or rising reservoir levels , in accordance with the guidance of DR 1130-2-16, and generally stable or gradually declining river stages on the Apalachicola River, for approximately 4 to 6 weeks during the designated spawning period for the specified project area. Generally stable or rising levels are defined as not lowering the reservoir levels by more than 6 inches, with the base elevation generally adjusted upward as levels rise due to increased inflows or refilling of the reservoir. Generally stable or gradually declining river stages are defined as ramping down of ½ foot per day or less. When these management goals are not possible, impose an unreasonable compromise to other project purposes, or would conflict with other fish management concerns within the basin, the Corps shall consult with the State fishery agencies and the FWS on balancing needs within the system and minimizing the impacts of fluctuating reservoir or river levels. Modifications to fish spawn operations could include readjusting the base elevation for fish spawn operation purposes at a particular project, allowing a rapid lowering in elevation back to the base elevation or a readjusted elevation following a flood event, or other operational adjustments recommended by the interagency team to minimize impacts and/or enhance system-wide benefits. The Corps shall also consult with the State fishery agencies and the FWS on water management operations that would minimize fishery impacts and balance needs throughout the system for the remaining portions of the fish spawn periods. The Corps shall schedule management responsibilities that conflict with operating for stable or rising reservoir levels or relatively stable river stages outside the fish spawning period to the extent practicable, consistent with other applicable laws and regulations.
- a. In February of each year Mobile District staff representatives will meet with the fisheries biologists from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi and the FWS to discuss

projected spring and summer trends, anticipated hydrological conditions within the basin, success of the past year’s fish spawn, and ways to balance fisheries priorities between reservoir and river systems during the upcoming spawning season. An imbalance of prey and forage fish could occur following the second or third year of poor or unsuccessful spawning and recruitment, leading to poor sport fishing. Areas where the spawns were recently unsuccessful should be given higher priority for fish management operations under low water conditions.

b. The periods during which the Corps shall operate to achieve the purposes of this SOP are as follows:

Administrative Office	Project/Water Body	Principal Fish Spawning Period for Operational Consideration
ACF PROJ MGMT OFFICE	Walter F. George Lake	15 March – 15 May
	Lake Seminole	01 March – 01 May
	Apalachicola River	01 April – 01 June
ALLATOONA PROJ MGMT OFFICE	Allatoona Lake	15 March – 15 May
LANIER PROJ MGMT OFFICE	Lake Sidney Lanier	01 April – 01 June
OKATIBBEE PROJ MGMT OFFICE	Okatibbee Lake	01 April – 01 June
WEST POINT PROJ MGMT OFFICE	West Point Lake	01 April – 01 June

c. Project personnel shall contact local State fisheries management personnel responsible for their project areas prior to the initiation of the identified spawning period and keep in close contact with them throughout the spawning period. PD-EI shall contact and maintain coordination with the State of Florida fisheries management personnel regarding initiation and status of fish spawning on the Apalachicola River. Information regarding the actual progress of fish spawn (i.e., has started, is in progress, is in peak, or has ended) should be relayed by project personnel to the Mobile District Office through OP-TR, and reported to EN-HW and PD–EI during the weekly water management meetings.

d. EN-HW will consider hydrologic conditions within the basin, recommendations from the State fisheries management agencies and FWS, and status of fish spawn at other locations within the basin to schedule fish spawn operations for each project area (reservoir or river system) within the basin. The goal will be to provide generally stable or rising levels on the reservoirs and/or generally stable or gradually declining river stages on the Apalachicola River for approximately 4 to 6 weeks during the spawning period identified for each water body. Efforts to minimize fishery impacts and balance fishery resource and other project needs within the basin during the remaining portions of the spawning periods will also consider recommendations from the State fishery management agencies and FWS. A summary of the status of fish spawn operations at each project (including date and elevation at initiation and completion of fish spawn operations) will be posted on the Mobile District Water Management website.

e. EN-HW will notify the PA office when fish spawning season begins and will invite PA to specific weekly water management meetings when important decisions having public impact are likely to be made. PA will advise the news media within 24 hours of notification of any specific water management actions that are potentially detrimental to the fish spawn, including an explanation of the reasons for the water management actions.

f. OP-TR will maintain an updated list of State and FWS fisheries biologists for the lake and river projects. OP-TR personnel will attend weekly water management meetings during the spawning period, relay pertinent information relating to the status of fish spawn or other fish management concerns to EN-HW, PD-EI and PA, and send weekly, either by e-mail or telephone, water conditions data to appropriate State and FWS fisheries personnel. OP-TR and PD-EI will consult telephonically with State and FWS fisheries personnel as necessary, and include project personnel in the consultation as appropriate. Any significant decisions based on the weekly water management meetings will also be relayed telephonically or by email to State fisheries personnel, FWS, project personnel, and South Atlantic Division personnel by OP-TR. PD-EI will advise any environmental groups or other interested stakeholder groups of the proposed action. At the conclusion of the spawning period, OP-TR will forward a summary report of the annual fish spawn operations to State fisheries management agencies, FWS, and South Atlantic Division, with a copy to PD-EI.

g. OP-TR, EN-HW, PD-EI and PA will coordinate directly with each other or call additional meetings as the need arises.

Date _____

PETER F. TAYLOR, JR.
Colonel, Corps of Engineers
Commanding

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