

Members of Congress and distinguished guests, I am Brigadier General Joseph Schroedel, Division Commander, South Atlantic Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this statement before you today concerning the Corps operations and management of the Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa River Basin encompassing parts of Georgia and Alabama and the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin encompassing parts of Alabama, Florida and Georgia. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers practices the principles of openness. We strive to maintain transparency concerning our operations and management of the systems. We do this by providing all our publics with as much data as possible via our web site, sharing of information with state and Federal agencies, meetings with our partners and communities in and around our projects, and through the media.

I would like to divide my statement into four parts: normal management, increasing the winter pool level to provide additional recreational opportunities at West Point Lake, Endangered Species Act, and the condition the basin finds itself in today.

## NORMAL MANAGEMENT

The Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa (ACT) Rivers system of projects consists of multipurpose projects providing for flood control, hydropower, navigation, water supply, water quality, recreation, and fish and wildlife conservation. The system has five Corps projects and ten Alabama Power Company dams. The Corps projects consist of two major storage projects, Allatoona and Carters in Georgia at the upper end of the basin, and three run-of-the-river projects at the lower end of the basin in Alabama. The Alabama Power Projects are located on the Coosa and Tallapoosa Rivers and are operated in conjunction with Corps projects to provide a minimum seven day average flow in the system. The Corps has flood control oversight of the Alabama Power Projects.

The ACT basin is experiencing the same drought conditions as other river basins in the Southeast. The two upper most projects, Allatoona and Carters, are experiencing inflows averaging 10 to 50 percent of normal. Allatoona is currently 9-feet below normal pool and Carters is 10.5 feet below normal. At the lower end of the system in the Alabama River, depths are 6-feet below the authorized project depth of 9 feet. Only minimum flows are currently being released from Carters. Allatoona is only generating two hours a day. Due to the drought, the Alabama River situation has caused one company to modify its water intake to remain operational and another to switch to alternate transportation modes to remain operational.

The Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) Rivers system of projects also consists of multipurpose projects providing for flood control, hydropower, navigation, water supply, water quality, recreation, and fish and wildlife conservation. The Federal projects on the system begin with Lake Sidney Lanier at the headwaters, West Point Lake, Lake Walter F. George, George W. Andrews, and Lake Seminole at the lower end of the basin. There are several lakes with hydropower facilities operated by private and public utilities along the system as well.

Under normal circumstances the Corps operates and manages these reservoirs to meet all project purposes in accordance with the draft water management plans developed in the late 1980s. These plans establish certain zones of water levels which trigger actions when these levels are reached. This management has proven to be successful in meeting project purposes

when water within the basin is plentiful.

Issues begin to arise primarily when drought hits the system. The management plan calls for balancing the various reservoirs with available water in the basin to keep them generally in the same action zones. These zones have been developed to meet the authorized project purposes to the maximum extent possible under varying water conditions. As you are all well aware, the Southeast has been in a moderate to severe drought throughout 2006. We have modeled the reservoir levels using the assumption that this year's conditions are similar to those of the drought of 2000. Based on that assumption, we expect West Point Lake to reach its lowest point in mid-winter (January), possibly a decline of another 2-4 feet, before winter flows begin to refill the lake.

The next reservoir down the system is Lake Walter F. George. The authorized project purposes are hydropower, navigation, recreation, water quality, and fish and wildlife conservation. Walter F. George is also experiencing drought conditions. The lake is currently about 2.7-feet below its normal pool level for this time of year. In a like manner with West Point, we also modeled Walter F. George and the results indicate it will remain at or near its current level through the winter. This will keep both lakes at the top of Action Zone 2 if additional rains do not occur between now and mid-winter.

Looking on the positive side, weather experts tell us an El Niño condition has developed in the Pacific, which typically brings higher than normal rains to the Southeastern United States during the winter months.

However, until the rains come, the Corps will continue to operate with the current management plan, doing our best to meet the authorized project purposes to the maximum extent possible under the current drought conditions.

#### WINTER POOL LEVEL

West Point Lake was authorized with five purposes. They are recreation, hydropower, flood control, navigation, and fish and wildlife conservation. Concern has been expressed that the Corps has prioritized those purposes to make flood control and fish and wildlife conservation higher priorities than recreation.

The Corps makes every effort to meet all authorized project purposes to the fullest extent possible with available water. A request to raise the winter pool level from the current conservation level of 628 to 630-feet has been submitted by local interests. After much consideration, the Corps has declined to grant that request for this year. This decision has apparently led some to have concerns that flood control is being given priority over recreation.

Let me explain how operational decisions are influenced by a variety of factors and how priorities are established among authorized project purposes. Operation of Corps reservoirs must take into account current and predicted future conditions, as well as known seasonal weather patterns. For instance, in drought conditions, conserving water for human and industrial consumption becomes a higher priority. Some other uses, such as recreation and hydropower, may temporarily become a lower priority. Likewise, in times when the risk of

flooding becomes greater, flood control operations rise in priority over other conflicting uses. Water is sometimes released in larger quantities than would otherwise be the case in anticipation of a flood event.

In Georgia, the annual seasonal weather pattern is typically one of wet winter and spring months, followed by drier months in the summer and fall, with the driest month typically being October. For this reason, the operational plans for most of these lakes call for annual drawdowns in advance of the wet season. This gives us the extra storage needed to protect downstream residents from potential flood events. This conservative approach has served us well through the years, preventing or reducing much flooding in the basin during storm events.

The winter pool level at West Point Lake was originally authorized at 625 and was raised to 628 when the draft water management plan was developed in the late 1980s, an action which provides for increased recreation opportunities. To further increase that level, which would remove an additional two feet of available flood control storage, would have an effect on flood damage reduction and other potential impacts, not just the recreational benefits. Under the current management plan, the amount of flood storage provides a level of flood protection to downstream homes and businesses. It would be unwise to increase the risk to those Georgia and Alabama citizens downstream without first identifying the risk and potential economic loss resulting from decreased flood protection, or how any increased risk could be mitigated.

I am aware that a study was commissioned by concerned organizations earlier this year to analyze the flood control capability of West Point Lake. While the conclusions of that report may prove to be correct, the analysis did not address the fundamental question of the cost of induced flood damages downstream of the dam, nor was the specific economic analysis of increased recreation and other benefits, such as fish and wildlife conservation, addressed.

To make an informed decision on increasing the winter pool level, a study must be done which quantifies the increased risk to downstream citizens, the annual cost of that increased risk of flooding, the cost to mitigate increased flood risk, the socio-economic benefits of a high winter pool level for recreation and other purposes, and any impacts on or benefits to fish and wildlife.

## ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been in informal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act concerning operations in the ACF basin to protect endangered mussels since early 2000. In 2002, Gulf Sturgeon spawning in the Apalachicola River became an operational concern when portions of spawning habitat below Jim Woodruff Dam became exposed during the spring spawning months. At that time, Mobile District agreed to collect additional information to assist in completing consultation on the effects of operations at the Jim Woodruff Dam and associated releases to the Apalachicola River. During informal consultation and as new scientific information became available, the Corps has adjusted our operations at Jim Woodruff were adjusted as necessary to provide adequate flow conditions to afford protection for Gulf sturgeon and two types of protected mussel species in the Apalachicola River. In early 2006, the results of our informal consultations with USFWS over the past few years were incorporated into an Interim Operations Plan, or IOP, for releases from Jim Woodruff Dam to provide the necessary flows

under varying conditions to afford protection to these species. Over the years, the IOP has been revised and updated as new scientific information became available. In early 2006, the Corps entered into formal consultation with the Service which resulted in a Biological Opinion on the IOP being issued by the USFWS on September 5, 2006, which included some revisions to the IOP.

The Biological Opinion basically sets the parameters for flow requirements below Jim Woodruff Dam to provide protection to the species at various times of the year and under various conditions such as a drought. It establishes an absolute minimum flow, flow thresholds which allow a certain percent of water to be stored at the projects, and the points at which 100 percent of inflows must be released. These thresholds provide protection for the species while still allowing us to operate the system. During drought conditions, not all project purposes can be fully met, and only the minimum basin inflows would be released in support of endangered species.

We have simulated the West Point Lake and Walter F. George lake levels for both with and without the IOP operation specified in the Biological Opinion. The modeling shows that as of 1 October, the current lake levels would be approximately 1-foot higher without implementation of the IOP/BIOP. It should also be noted that during less extreme conditions, the impacts of the IOP/BIOP would be negligible on lake levels at West Point.

#### TODAY'S ENVIRONMENT

The Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint Rivers system currently exists in two environments which make any and all operation and management decisions a challenge. First, as I have previously discussed, is the drought. With the help of El Niño, we may see that environment change over the next few months. The second environment is a much greater challenge and that is the disagreement among the states over water allocation and best management of the system.

I do not have the solution to this issue; however I pledge the full support and technical expertise of the Corps in providing whatever assistance is requested to help achieve a successful resolution for all involved.

#### SUMMARY

Thank you for the opportunity to update you on the operations and management of the Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa and Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint Rivers systems of projects, and specifically our operations at West Point Lake. I assure you the Corps is committed to working with all stakeholders in the basin to provide the best management and operation of the river systems. I am hopeful the ongoing mediation process will produce a framework to bring protection and balance to these precious resources.