DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

COMPLETE STATEMENT

OF

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U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

BEFORE THE

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

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INTRODUCTION

Members of Congress and distinguished guests, I am Brigadier General Michael J. Walsh, 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 principle of openness. We strive to maintain transparency in our operations providing all our publics with as much data as possible via our web site, sharing of information with state and Federal agencies, and through the media concerning our operations and management of this system.

I would like to divide my statement into three parts: normal management, support for the endangered species act, and the gauge calibration error at Lake Lanier.

NORMAL MANAGEMENT

The Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa Rivers project is a multipurpose project 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 30-percent of normal. Allatoona is currently 6.5-feet below normal summer pool and Carters is 10 feet below normal. Releases from Allatoona are being kept to a minimum with only two hours of hydropower generation a day plus a continuous 240 cubic feet per second release for water quality purposes. Carters, which is a pump back hydropower generating system, is operating in the pump back mode only.

At the lower end of the system in the Alabama River, depths are 6-feet below project depth to support navigation. The only releases occurring at the Corps projects are the minimum flows coming from the upstream Alabama Power Projects. The Alabama River situation, due to the drought, has caused one major industry to modify its water intake to remain operational.

The Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint Rivers project is also a multipurpose project providing for flood control, hydropower, navigation, water supply, water quality, recreation and fish and wildlife conservation. The Federal projects on the basin 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 that trigger actions when these levels are reached. This management has proven to be successful in meeting project purposes.

It is primarily when drought hits the system that issues begin to arise. The Corps continues to operate and manage the system based on the above mentioned plan. This calls for balancing the various reservoirs with available water to keep them in the same action zones. These zones have been developed to meet as many project purposes as possible with dwindling water availability during a drought.

As conditions worsen during times of drought, some project purposes become a higher priority. These priorities include water supply, water quality, hydropower and fish and wildlife conservation. Fortunately, we are often able to simultaneously meet several of these needs with one action. For example, water released for water quality can also be run through a generator to produce hydropower.

Like many of the systems operated and managed in the Southeast, along with most of the nation, this river basin system is in a drought. The National Weather Service Drought Monitor shows North Georgia is in a moderate drought and as you move southward it is

characterized as a severe drought. We operate and manage this basin as a system; when the lower basin receives less inflow, we must augment flows from stored water to maintain balance.

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

The Corps and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have been in consultation since 2000 concerning various mussel species and, more recently, the Gulf Sturgeon, which all fall under the protection of the Endangered Species Act. Together we have developed an interim operations plan to provide adequate water from the system to protect and enhance the habitat of these species. During normal conditions, these needs have been met through routine operation and management.

As we entered the drought period, management for these species has become more difficult. From March through late June, our flow regimes have been in accordance with the Interim Operations Plan (IOP) that is the subject of Formal Section 7 Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. As part of the litigation actions, the Court ordered specific flows in late June through early July. The States and other parties to the litigation actions, the Court ordered specific flows in late June through early July. The States and other parties to the litigation then agreed to a flow regime that took us through late July. Today we are once again operating in accordance with the IOP. The formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the IOP is on-going. The Biological Opinion from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a result of the formal consultation process is due September 5, 2006.

GAUGE CALIBRATION ERROR

On June 16 of this year we discovered we had a gauge calibration error at Lake Sidney Lanier. This error led us to release additional water that would not normally have been released during that timeframe.

In December, 2005 during routine maintenance of the gauge, it was discovered that certain components were worn. New parts were ordered and installed, to include a device called a selsyn. A selsyn is an encoder that reads the mechanical data provided by the float via the pulley. It converts the mechanical data to electronic data which is sent to the powerhouse indicating the lake level. As part of the installation, a scaling factor had to be programmed into the selsyn and we input the factor recommended by the manufacturer. Unfortunately we were not clear in our communications with the manufacturer in that we had not replaced the pulley attached to the selsyn. The manufacturer assumed both the selsyn and the pulley were new, and provided a scaling factor for a complete new system. The result was that we inputted a scaling factor that was not appropriate for the existing pulley attached to the new selsyn.

Between the time of installation and mid-April of this year, levels at Lake Lanier remained relatively stable and no error was detected. Beginning in mid-April we began making water releases for downstream needs in accordance with the IOP. The calibration

error led us to believe we had a higher pool level than actually existed, indicating a greater inflow into the lake than was actually occurring. We were operating under the IOP, which required us to essentially release one hundred percent of basin inflows to mimic a run of the river flow for the entire basin. As the gauge data were not correct, we were releasing more water than was actually entering the lake by approximately one half inch per day. Consistent with our policy of openness about our operations, we informed congressional interests, stakeholders and the general public as soon as we learned of this problem.

We have corrected the gauge error and we have confirmed the accuracy of all our gauges on the system. In addition we have installed redundant gauges at all projects and updated procedures to verify their accuracy.

SUMMARY

Thank you for the opportunity to update you on the management of the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint Rivers project. I assure you the Corps is committed to working with all stakeholders in the basin to provide the best management and operation of our lakes. I am hopeful the current mediation process that is taking place among the three states and the Army will produce a framework to bring mutual protection and balance to this precious resource.