



# NEWS RELEASE

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

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For Immediate Release:  
Jan. 20, 2011  
News Release No.11-05

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## RESERVOIR DISCHARGE RATES TO REMAIN AT CURRENT LEVELS

**SAVANNAH, Ga.** – The [Savannah District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers](#) will keep discharge rates from its three reservoirs on the upper Savannah River at the currently reduced “drought level 1” rates following an environmental assessment (EA) conducted this month.

The Corps based its decision on comments received from the public, environmental organizations and state and federal resource agencies. Because the three reservoirs – lakes [Hartwell](#), [Russell](#), and [Thurmond](#) – remain only in the first of four drought levels, state and federal resource agencies advised the Corps that potential damage to the downstream ecosystem outweighed the small water savings that would have resulted from reduced flows. The Corps’ environmental assessment proposed to reduce outflows from the Thurmond Dam to 3,600 cubic feet per second (cfs) from Jan. 1 through Feb. 15 from the current authorized 3,800 cfs to 4,200 cfs maximum daily outflow. In recent weeks outflows have held close to 4,000 cfs, a rate within the pre-determined range for drought level 1.

The EA examined the effects of reducing discharges on the Savannah River. “We launched the EA this season as a proactive step to preserve water in reservoirs as we face a predicted dry winter and spring” said [Col. Jeff Hall, Savannah District Commander](#). “This process highlights the complexities of managing the vast Savannah River system as a ‘system.’”

The Corps of Engineers reservoirs have multiple purposes including flood risk reduction, water supply, water quality, recreation, navigation, environmental stewardship and hydropower production. The Corps strives to balance all the purposes as conditions change.

The Corps received 365 comments supporting the proposed winter flow reduction, primarily from residents living near the reservoirs.

However, some Federal and state natural resource agencies, including NOAA Fisheries, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, objected to the reduction as a danger to downstream ecosystems. They cited potential impacts to:

- Spawning grounds for the endangered shortnose sturgeon
- Water flows in the Augusta Shoals
- Water quality in the Savannah Harbor
- Impacts to the Savannah River estuary

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources accepted the reduction on the condition that the Corps conducts a thorough review of the basin’s drought contingency plan before making any future flow reduction requests.

The city of Augusta, the Center for a Sustainable Coast, the Georgia chapter of the Sierra Club, and the Southern Environmental Law Center also objected to the flow reduction.

Addressing the environmental concerns would extend beyond the time period of the proposed winter flow reduction.

From mid-December 2008 through February 2009, the Savannah District reduced outflows from Thurmond Dam to 3,100 cfs in response to the worst period of drought since opening Thurmond Dam in 1954. Reservoir levels approached the most restrictive of the four-level drought response plan. The District conducted an EA at that time and determined that a reduction then could potentially avoid a greater ecological disaster. [Current reservoir levels](#) have only dipped one to two feet below the average for this time of year.

“After examining all the public and agency comments, and recognizing we are presently in a Level 1 drought, we decided that the risks of potential adverse environmental impacts exceed the benefits which would be obtained by reducing flows from the Savannah River reservoirs for such a short time this year,” Hall said.

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The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ Savannah District manages and oversees a multi-billion dollar military construction program at 12 Army and Air Force installations in Georgia and North Carolina. Corps’ projects range from barracks, hospitals and clinics to equipment shops, headquarters buildings and aircraft hangars. The Savannah District also has oversight and maintains civil works projects – from the Savannah and Brunswick harbors to the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway - as well as three lakes and hydroelectric dams along the Savannah River.