



**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, SAVANNAH DISTRICT
100 W. OGLETHORPE AVENUE
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA 31401-3604**

June 12, 2017

**PUBLIC NOTICE
Savannah District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers**

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

SUBJECT: Notice of Availability of a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA), and Draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Savannah River Basin Comprehensive Study (SRBCS) Interim #2. The report evaluated potential changes to the Drought Contingency Plan to improve management of water resources during drought conditions

Notice of the following is hereby given:

1. Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, notice is hereby given that the Savannah District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) proposes to modify the Drought Contingency Plan to improve management of water resources during droughts. The improvements in water resource management would result from changes in the timing and amount of discharge from J. Strom Thurmond Dam and Lake during droughts.
2. Savannah District announces the availability to the public of a Draft EA and Draft FONSI concerning modifications to the Drought Contingency Plan which would result in the most positive impacts and least negative impacts on the authorized project purposes (Hydropower, Recreation, Environmental, Water Supply, Navigation, and Flood Risk Management). Copies of the documents can be downloaded from the District website at <http://www.sas.usace.army.mil/About/DivisionsandOffices/PlanningDivision/PlansandReports.aspx>. Copies may also be obtained through email request to the following address: CESAS-PD@usace.army.mil, or by contacting Mr. Nathan Dayan at (912) 652- 5172.
3. Written statements regarding the Draft EA and FONSI for the proposed action will be received at the Savannah District Office until

12 O'CLOCK NOON, July 13, 2017

from those interested in the activity and whose interests may be affected by the proposed action.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION: The proposed action would increase conservation opportunities within the reservoirs by flattening the Drought Level 1 and 2 triggers, raising trigger Level 3, and slightly decreasing the required flows for each drought level. Drought trigger Level 1 would be located at the same elevation as the current winter guide curve of 4 feet down from the summer guide curve. The guide curve is USACE's operational target for the reservoir elevation. Drought trigger Level 2 would be located 2 feet below drought trigger Level 1. Drought trigger Level 3 would be located 2 feet below drought trigger Level 2, which is 6 feet higher than in the NAA. When in drought trigger Level 1, JST would target a daily average release of 4,000 cfs. When in drought trigger Level 2, JST would aim for a daily average release of, 3,800 cfs from February through October, and 3,600 cfs from November through January. When in drought trigger Level 3, Thurmond would target a daily average release of 3,600 cfs from February through October, and 3,100 cfs from November through January.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY EVALUATION:

Environmental Assessment: Savannah District has prepared a Draft EA and found that an Environmental Impact Statement will not be required for this action. The Draft EA is being coordinated concurrently with this Notice to Federal and state natural resource agencies and public for review and comment.

Wetlands: With implementation of the proposed action, there would be negligible effects on wetlands in the project area due to the benign nature of the action. The alternatives being evaluated would not change where the water goes, but only adjusts the timing and quantity of water flowing within the Savannah River during drought conditions when water levels in the lakes and river are already low.

Threatened, Endangered and other Protected Species: The proposed action assumes implementation of the draft 2014 FERC Agreement (1,500 cfs minimum for Augusta Shoals) for the Augusta Canal, which provides important spawning habitat for the state-listed robust redhorse, shoals spider lily, Altamaha arc mussel, Savannah lilliput (mussel), and spawning habitat for federally listed shortnose and Atlantic sturgeon. These flows will ensure that the proper amount of water will be available for the listed species above to avoid any additional negative impacts during drought conditions. Savannah District concludes that the proposed alternative "may affect, but is not likely to adverse effect" state and Federal listed species.

Cultural Resources: Section 106 consultation conducted for the 2012 update of the Drought Contingency Plan determined that fluctuating water levels would or could have the potential to adversely affect significant archaeological or historical resources and a Programmatic Agreement was developed to assess the degree of impacts. No additional adverse impacts would result to significant archaeological or historical resources due to changes in water depths and durations. At this time, it is not precisely

known what effect fluctuating water levels have already had on cultural resources that exist within the project area and if operations as proposed under these alternatives will further impact resources. If such impacts associated with changes to the hydrologic pattern have already impacted resources in the project area, then current proposed changes would have no additional adverse effect on historic properties. Savannah District is implementing the 2012 cultural resources Programmatic Agreement to understand the effects of fluctuating water levels on archaeological sites within the project area. Once the surveys and assessments have been completed, a more accurate determination of effect can be made.

Essential Fish Habitat: With implementation of the proposed action, there is the potential to alter Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) in the estuary in the lower Savannah River Basin area. Although the reduced flow volume would change velocities, the extent of those changes would be too small to be measurable. The changes in salinity within the harbor from the alternatives being evaluated are minor and would not change or alter the EFH habitat. As the EFH habitat extends up river only as far as the tide goes, the majority of the expected changes in the river and lake portions of the Savannah River Basin would not impact EFH habitat. As a result, Savannah District believes that these temporary changes to Essential Fish Habitats are minor and do not warrant mitigation.

Water Quality Certification: Updated Section 401 Water Quality Certifications from the States of Georgia and South Carolina are not needed for the proposed action since the action would not result in additional fill being placed in the waters of the U.S. or any excavation. The primary effect of the proposed action is the amount of water that would flow down the river during drought conditions.

Coastal Zone Consistency: Updated Coastal Zone Consistency concurrences from the States of Georgia and South Carolina are not needed since the proposed action does not include additional fill being placed in the waters of the U.S. or any excavation. The primary effect of the proposed action is the amount of water that would flow down the river during drought conditions.

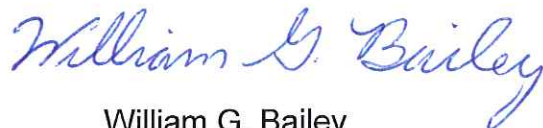
Clean Air Act: With implementation of the proposed action, hydropower generation would slightly increase when compared to the existing conditions. Therefore, there would not need to be as much power generation from alternate power sources, such as coal or natural gas, which release more greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere.

Application of the Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines: No additional fill would be placed in the waters of the U.S. Therefore, an updated Section 404(b)(1) evaluation is not required.

Public Interest Review: The decision whether to proceed with the project as proposed will be based on an evaluation of the probable impact, including cumulative impacts, of the proposed activity on the public interest. That decision will reflect the national concern for both the protection and use of important resources. The benefits which reasonably may be expected to accrue from the proposal will be balanced against its reasonably foreseeable detriments. All factors that may be relevant to the proposal will be considered. Among these are conservation, economics, aesthetics, general environmental concerns, wetlands, historic properties, fish and wildlife, land use, recreation, water supply and conservation, water quality, energy needs, safety, consideration of property ownership, environmental justice, and, in general, the needs and welfare of the people.

Consideration of Public Comments: USACE is soliciting comments from the public; Federal, State, and local agencies and officials; Native American Tribes; and other interested parties in order to consider and evaluate the impacts of the proposed activity. Any comments received will be considered by USACE in its deliberations on this action. To make this decision, comments are used to assess impacts to endangered species, wetlands, historic properties, water quality, general environmental effects, and the other public interest factors listed above. Comments are used in the preparation of the Final EA and FONSI pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. Comments are also used to determine the need for a public hearing and to determine the overall public interest of the proposed activity.

Comment Period: Anyone wishing to comment to the Corps on this proposed action should submit comments no later than the end of the comment period which is 30 days from publication shown in this notice, in writing, to the Savannah District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Planning Branch, ATTN: Mr. Nathan Dayan (PD), 100 West Oglethorpe Avenue, Savannah, Georgia 31401-3640, by FAX to 912-652-5787, or by emailing the comments to the following address: CESAS-PD@usace.army.mil.



William G. Bailey
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