



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE Mountain-Prairie Region



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Karen L. Durham-Aguilera, P.E.
Director, Programs
USACE Northwestern Division
P.O. Box 2870
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FEB 24 2006

Dear Ms. Durham-Aguilera:

Thank you for the opportunity to review your draft Environmental Assessment for the Inclusion of Technical Criteria for Spring Pulse Releases from Gavins Point Dam and the draft Appendix I related to Adaptive Management of the Missouri River System. We understand these documents will be used to update your Record of Decision regarding the March 2004 Master Manual revision. The following comments have been developed in consideration of Reasonable and Prudent Alternative VII of the 2003 Amended Biological Opinion on the Operation of the Missouri River Reservoir System, Bank Stabilization and Navigation Project, and Kansas River Reservoir System (Biological Opinion), which states in part:

The Corps shall ensure that within 2 years, based on results of the adaptive management and feasibility processes, a flow management plan will be implemented to provide a spring rise and summer low flow which will provide for the life history needs of the pallid sturgeon. This long-term flow regime must address, based on the best available information, spawning, rearing, maximization of the floodplain connectivity, forage production and shallow water habitat. The long-term flow regime shall be reflective of the normalized river hydrology in order to be responsive to dry, intermediate, and wet conditions. Such a pulse shall be developed collaboratively, in conjunction with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and U.S. Geological Survey as well as with Tribes, States, and Stakeholders. If the operating year starting on March 1, 2006, is other than a median year, the Corps shall proportionally modify the flow regime either up or down depending on if the runoff is projected to be in the upper quartile water year definition or the lower quartile and within the bounds of human health and human safety for the wetter period.


In response to this direction, and reflective of the input from the stakeholders in the Missouri River basin, the Corps has proposed operating parameters which include a bimodal spring pulse from Gavins Point Dam. We believe that these parameters, when implemented in conjunction with a comprehensive adaptive management program to address future operational flexibility (e.g., duration, shape, location, measurement, magnitude, and dates of pulse), will meet the intended purpose outlined in the Biological Opinion for 2006 and beyond.

A key component to this success is adaptive management - a continual process of planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and adjusting management to meet predefined goals. A science-based adaptive management approach allows the Corps, Service and other Federal, State and tribal agencies and stakeholders to proceed collaboratively towards restoration of the Missouri River ecosystem. This approach will lead us from our current ecological condition on the Missouri River towards an ecosystem that allows self-sustaining populations of least terns, piping plovers and pallid sturgeon.

We applaud the Corps for beginning the process of organizing basin area scientists to assist in the design and implementation of the pallid sturgeon population assessment program, the shallow water habitat monitoring program and the spring rise monitoring plan. These monitoring efforts are key first steps in the process of developing a functional adaptive management program built on science and collaboration. We encourage the Corps to continue its progress in this effort, including focused public outreach. Including stakeholders throughout the development of this program will provide them the opportunity to participate and understand the important connection between planning, monitoring, evaluation, and action in the adaptive management cycle.

We appreciate the Corps' continued support of Missouri River restoration efforts and look forward to working with you on this important task.

Sincerely,

**ACTING
Deputy** 
Regional Director

cc: Rose Hargrave, Corps, Omaha District
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