

FTS-DOT-US FWS

**Moderator: Tom MacKenzie
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12:00 pm CT**

Coordinator: Welcome to the Water News Media Conference Call. Parties will be on a listen only mode until the question and answer session of today's conference. At that time you can press star 1 to ask a question. This call is being recorded. If you have any objections you may disconnect.

I'd like to introduce your host for today's conference. Mr. Tom MacKenzie.

Tom MacKenzie: Thank you very much operator, I appreciate it. Welcome all of you all who are joining us. We hope to have a good and informative session here today. I'd like to lay out just a couple of standard ground rules that we'll be working on. Once we go to Q & A if you could please contain to one question and a follow-up and then we'll spin around until everybody's got an opportunity to ask their questions. We're good to go for an hour conference call at this point unless there are not questions then we'll terminate earlier at that point.

Please only media some credited outlets asking questions, would be much appreciated. Again we will have an audio transcription both in MP3 form as well as transcript form. The audio portion will be available hopefully in about an hour on the closure of this conference and the transcript should be available

by tomorrow afternoon sometime hopefully within about 24 hours from the end. And that will be posted on our Web site at FWS.gov/southeast/drought.

I'd like to also spell a couple of the names as well just in case you didn't have the media advisor in front of you. Some of the people you're expecting to be hearing will be the Southeast Regional Director, Sam D as in Delta Hamilton, the Southeast Regional Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also from the Corps of Engineers' South Atlantic Division, Commander Brigadier General Joseph S-c-h-r-o-e-d as in Delta e-l. Additional participants may be Gail Carmody who is the Panama City Field Supervisor and that's spelled C-a-r-m-o-d as in Delta-Y, we may also have Curtis Flakes from the Mobile District U.S. Army Corps. of Engineers who is the Chief of Planning and Environmental Division, spelled F as in Frank l-a-k-e-s.

At this time we expect to be joined by Sam Hamilton our Regional Director who will say a few words on the biological opinion followed by General Joseph Schroedel discussing the revised interim operating plan followed by Q & A period.

At this point I have the pleasure of introducing Sam Hamilton.

Sam Hamilton: Thank you Tom. It's certainly a pleasure to be here today. I'd like to take a few minutes to - to go over the biological opinion and - and then turn it to the Corps and before I - before I do that I just want to say that we have been able to produce a biological opinion again in record speed in about a 45 day period and the reason that we were able to do that is an unbelievable, unparalleled, I think an unprecedented coordination and collaboration with the Army Corps. We have worked this issue about as closely as any that I've seen in my career. We've been working with them day and night on modeling efforts trying to understand the hydrology of this very, very complex river system and the

effects that it potentially will have on threatening endangered species up and down the - the Apalachicola (plant) river basin.

As we have worked with the Corps very closely and - and looking at the modeling and refining the understanding of the hydrology it was pretty clear to me if I'd looked at it that there is enormous demands being placed on a limited resource out there and this is something that doesn't come as a surprise to any of us but as we've done the modeling you can see that the Corps has done a - a masterful job in my opinion trying to - to distribute the water to the various interests that are out there including the threatened and endangered species that we're mostly interested in at this point.

The interim operating plan that we've been asked to consult on the Corps proposed about 45 days ago and the way that I look at this, this is really only a bridge to get us to hopefully something that is more long term in the future and that is that the Corps began it's process for updating it's water manuals and hopefully as the states continue to dialogue in the future about how to allocate water among the states, therein lies I think the hope for the future that we'll see some stabilization of these water discussions and water in the system.

This biological opinion is a five year biological opinion and we structured it that way in order to be able to see our way through the Corps planning process as they updated their models and their overall program for the operation of the system. This opinion is as we've looked at it we've looked at three - four species of Gulf sturgeon and three species of mussels. As we've analyzed it we've determined that this would be a non-jeopardy opinion and that the actions that Corps proposed will not jeopardize these species into the future and certainly looking over the five year period. The Gulf sturgeon is a large, long-lived fish, it's been imperiled and it's been listed as threatened

throughout the Gulf of Mexico primarily because of over-fishing as well as habitat alteration principally the construction of dams that have affected its ability to reproduce over time.

The three mussel species, the fat three-ridge, the purple bankclimber and the Chipola slabshell, these species also have been affected over the years because of the construction of dams and how water either flows from the channel within the Chattahoochee and Apalachicola has been altered over time and degradation of that channel.

The analysis that we did looking at the Gulf sturgeon the main issue that we found in the Corps operating plan was that when they are storing water in the spring time and this plan that has been revised that we consulted on does allow for more storage than the previous operating plan and so how during high flows high water reductions are actually occurring out there and the effect that it has on - on where the eggs of the sturgeon are actually laid certainly is going to have an effect and so we've analyzed that.

We also looked at the mussels as opposed to the high flows, you know, the concern there is - are the low flows and historically before dams were constructed on the ACF system rarely if ever did flows fall below 5,000 yet we saw this summer, this past summer, where flows fell below 5,000 and were approaching the 4,500 cfs. The revised interim operating plan does have a trigger for when to go to - below - go to 4,500 cfs and so that is something that we analyzed looking at the effect it would have on these listed species.

When we looked at the hydrology working very closely with the Corps we saw that looking back over 70 years and projecting into the future that the likelihood of this occurring might be one time. The 4,500 cfs flow is expected to cause the loss of - of 9% of the fat free-ridge in the event that the Corps is -

is faced with having to - to drop to that level. We've also estimated the loss of purple bankclimbers to be approximately 200 and the Chipola slabshell to be about 100. So we quantified to the extent that science will allow us the - the amount of loss associated with implementing this revised interim operating plan for the next five years. And in so doing we did conclude that this is a non-jeopardy opinion.

In addition though, as part as this opinion we've asked that the Army Corps to consider several options to avoid and minimize the impact of species. And these are reasonable and prudent measures. And the first one is there continues to be new information that pours into the Corps and to the Fish and Wildlife Service on this matter everyday as well as - as, you know, we expect to in the future. And so using an adaptive approach is going to be very, very important in making sure that - that we use the best science and best information and so we've asked the Corps and I have no doubt that they would agree that - that that is a very good way to proceed in this very dynamic process that we're in.

We've also asked the Corps to revisit and look very carefully at how basin inflow is calculated to make sure that we understand the water withdraws that are occurring from the headwaters all the way downstream. So we have a good understanding as well as all those stakeholders out there about what the true inflow end of the Chattahoochee system is and how much water's actually being pulled out and more work needs to be done there. The revised interim operating plan no longer has ramping rates or reduced flows as we drop from a higher flow down to lower flows and we've asked the Corps to continue to refine the information on that, look at modeling and see if there are ways to - to help mitigate the effect of these dropping flows on some of the endangered mussels.

And as - as we've also asked that the Corps embrace and about, you know, a comprehensive monitoring program to ensure that we're doing all that is possible to minimize the effect of these operations on - on listed species. And for the first time in our biological opinion we've looked beyond just the endangered species requirements of the Act and we've looked forward to the water control manual process that the Army Corps is going to undertake and we've identified under another law, the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, some areas we would like to see given strong and equal cor - consideration as we go forward.

And that's looking at the Apalachicola base system that (unintelligible) and the fresh water inflows and what it's going to take in terms of flows to maintain a good balance of freshwater and saltwater to support that world class and commercial sport fishery that's supported there. And - and the last one is to look at the effect of this operation on one of our National Wildlife Refuges, Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge.

I think in closing before I turn it over to General Schroedel is that it's been even though we ended up with a jeopardy - non-jeopardy opinion this go-round, this is not the (glad path) that I think we need to be on. The trajectory out a number of years, if we continue down this road is that we very well could end up with a situation where we find ourselves facing a jeopardy opinion with many listed species. The demands on this river basin are continuing to increase and so how we distribute the water and how we allocate the water is going to be very critical in the future. And that is something that is going to take cooperation from all the states working together because this is really just the short bridge until hopefully we can get to a point where we have a more stable allocation of water in the ACS system and that these - these competing uses are equitably distributed over time.

So with that I think I'll turn it over to General Schroedel.

General Schroedel: Great, thanks Sam. Again this is General Joe Schroedel. Appreciate the opportunity to share some thoughts with the media today on this latest action in the long continuing saga of doing our best to - to manage this system for all the competing needs. I'm going to offer an overview and then I'm going to hand it off to Colonel (Byron Journes) of the Mobile District and our experts to help handle some of the questions but let me emphasize two points up front. To emphasize something Sam - Sam said and also to emphasize the two points that I think are critical for all of us to keep in mind here.

You know, first is especially during a dry out there is not enough water in this system to handle all of the needs that - that we've got to balance. And the second point I'd make is the adaptive approach and the monitoring scheme that Sam mentioned, it's imperative, and we will and we're committed to over the next several years and on into the future, to continue monitoring and learning from the system and as mother nature changes we have got to adapt to - to what, you know, we get. So I - I'd just offer up front those two quick points and that is that not enough water in the system to - to meet all of the needs, we've got to manage to meet all the needs the best we can and second that we have got to continue to be committed as a team to an adaptive approach with an extensive monitoring system to help us be responsive to changes - changes in the system.

I now want to thank Sam and his team for being responsive to us. Sam normally has, you know, 135 days and Sam again thanks for - for your willingness to work with us closely, you know, and expedite something that can normally be a very lengthy process. You know, I think your actions have been in keeping with the best interest of all the people living in the basin especially during this drought.

The first question that I think comes up is, you know, why even revise the IOP but clearly we learned a lot a year ago and it was necessary that we revise the IOP particularly in the area of drought management since our current plan was expiring on the first of June, as it did. In addition, you know, we've learned a great deal together and we've held now 18 bi-weekly calls -- conference calls -- on the ACF basin and we've actually held probably heading on 40-some calls on the ACT, we began that process sometime sooner. But I think that collaborative process which many of you have participated in has proven to be very helpful, one for us to understand stakeholders needs and concerns; two, to understand the system and how it changes and how it affects our operations and I think based on what we've learned, you know, we're able to put together a plan that best meets not only the needs but the interest of the stakeholders and we appreciate that.

And let me make sure everybody understands, we're still experiencing a drought in the ACF basin. You know, the winter season we just went through -- the rainy season -- gave us some relief. But I think all of you clearing recognize that the headwaters of this system Lake Lanier did not receive the relief that it needs. It is still well below the level that it should be at this point and time. And I think we all understand how crucial those headwaters are and to the entire system. Not just water supply needs but - but also the needs of the Apalachicola Bay. All fed by, served by that one large headwater lake. So until then, until Mother Nature gives us something better, we have got to manage (for) the worst conditions.

Next point I'd make and I think a question that all of you have on your mind is what's different about this plan? Well first the revised interim operating plan is still an interim plan until we complete our water control plan. And I think as most of you know we've been directed by the Secretary of the Army

to pursue that and we are. So that effort is well underway. But - but here are the differences in the revised plan. First the new plan incorporates a drought contingency plan in operations that allows for additional storage of water to a system - system recovery from periods of extreme drought.

Second the new plan provides further additional opportunities to store water as hydrologic conditions change while still providing support for the listed species of habitat on the Apalachicola River. This is especially - now this is accomplished in part by reducing limitations on resale by allowing the capture of 50% of basin inflows instead of the 30% previously allowed. And as Sam commented on, you know, they - the service has asked us to take another look at how we calculate those basin inflows. And that's a dialogue we've had ongoing with all three of the states.

Third change the new IOP provides opportunity to store all basin inflows greater than 5,000 cfs in the winter season and that's December through February. Fourth the new IOP establishes a trigger to reduce the minimum release of water from Jim Woodruff Dam from 5,000 to 4,500 cfs should we have to.

Fifth, it provides for the release of more water during the spawning period which is especially important for the endangered species at the lower end of the basin and lastly it reduces the frequency of Jim Woodruff - Jim Woodruff releases at less than 5,000 cfs. We've modeled all this and our experts will be glad to talk to you about some of the results of that - that modeling.

As we've emphasized over the last couple of years, the ACF has and will continue to be managed as a system. And our decisions are based on balancing all of the needs on the system as a whole not just one. So while today the Fish and Wildlife Service is rolling out their biological opinion which gives us the

coverage, legally to operate the system the way we intend this is only one aspect of, you know, the legal implications that we've got to consider as we rollout our plan.

The - I guess the last thing I'd say is we don't know what this drought is going to bring us. And it could be prolonged. So whether we're in a drought, prolonged drought and again we don't know what that - when the end of this drought will be but whether we're in a drought or normal conditions, we believe this plan is the best that we can come up with considering all of the input from stakeholders for the last almost a year, the experience that we've gained in operating the system during this drought -- a record drought -- and like I said listening to stakeholders concerns and interest we think that we've got the right framework to operate the system, balance the needs and then adjust our operations down the road should we have to if the conditions change.

So again thanks for all of you for - for your support as we've gone through this. In general I think the media coverage has been fairly well balanced. I think you all have done a great job of covering all the different aspects of - of this very tough, tough time and challenging issues between the states and we, the Corps of Engineers' and the Federal team, you know, remain committed to - to serve you and to serve the people of this region the best we can by doing the best we can with what we've got. And I think this plan accomplishes that.

So again thanks for your participation today and thanks for your service along the way. Thanks.

Tom MacKenzie: Thank you very much, Sir. Colonel (Journes) did you want to add on to that or what - what would you all like to - keep going into the details or how would you like to proceed, Sir? Colonel (Journes), you with us?

Okay, in that case we'll go right to Qs and As. Operator if you could please provide the instructions?

Coordinator: If you'd like to ask a question press star 1, please un mute your phone and record you name. To withdraw your question, press star 2. Once again it's star 1 to ask a question. Please standby for the first question.

(Colonel Journes): Yes and I'm sorry, this is (Colonel Journes) and I am here.

Tom MacKenzie: Roger, Sir. Did you want to continue in extended detail or go right to Q & A?

(Colonel Journes): No I think we'll go right to Q & A.

Tom MacKenzie: Good to go, will do. Thank you.

Coordinator: Our first question is from (Jim Strickland) of (WSB) Television.

(Jim Strickland): Good afternoon. I'm trying to find just for those of us that are not recovering this full-time. From what I heard from the General, the biggest bullet point of the five that he seemed to list was a capturing of the basin inflows increase from 50% to 30%. I mean the bottom line from my viewers is what does this mean for lake users and for those that depend on Lake Lanier for drinking water. What - what - bottom line it for me in terms of the effect on Lake Lanier and the effect on the people that need that lake.

(Colonel Journes): Well this is (Colonel Journes) I'll jump in initially and I'll allow others from the Mobile team to add their comments. But what it means is the 50% mark, we can hold or retain more water within the basin than normally than previously we could. So more water in the basin and that's at all the projects,

it's not specific where the water falls so we can now hold that water be it at - be it at WF George, West Point or Lanier for that matter. And the more water we have in that basin then the more flexibility we have with releases downstream. Anybody in the Mobile team want to add to that?

Man: No sir, I think you covered it well.

(Jim Strickland): I've got - I've got one follow-up. Is there - with that increase in the - in storage in the basin is anybody making any predictions as to where Lanier's level is going to go if it's at 13 below now where we think it's going to go?

Tom MacKenzie: Yes I'll have (James) from our hydraulics and hydrology section answer that. Of course we can't predict too far out in the future but I think we clearly have a good sense of where Lake Lanier is now and certainly the way meteorologic forecasts suggest for the next couple months or ahead where we think things will be. James?

(James): (Jim) what I'll do, I'll repeat what we told the Lake Lanier association a few weeks back and we gave some forecasts (unintelligible) forecasts. As you well know forecasts can be very inconclusive and so we provided them a potential range of lake levels and as a reference as to where we are now. So potentially the lake could be 2-1/2 feet to maybe 6 feet lower than what it is now -- Six feet being the worst case scenario -- and we're able to predict for the next maybe three months out.

(Jim Strickland): Oh so lower despite the fact that you're able to store more water?

(James): Yes, Sir. And I - I keep (unintelligible) at that by saying that we - we're releasing from Lake Lanier the absolute minimum water to meet the water supply and water quality for Metro Atlanta. So the amount of water that we're

releasing from Lake Lanier will not change in the next two to three months but what could change is the rate of evaporation because of the heat and the amount of inflow that we get into Lake Lanier. But the outflow will remain essentially the same for the next two months.

(Man): So basically we're in the part of the season where mother nature now is not dropping any rain, any appreciable rain, in the - in the upper part of the basin from the Lake Lanier area and then of course with the weather and those kind of things that James talked about are - are pulling off the lake.

(Jim Strickland): Okay, thanks.

Coordinator: The next question is from (Margie Menzel) from the (Florida Public Radio).

(Margie Menzel): Thank you. I am looking at a letter dated May 9th to Ms. Carmody and Mr. Flakes from the Florida Congressional Delegation that are views that there haven't been shared responsibility during the current drought specifically in terms of restrictions on upstream users. And it ends in recent months under the Corps extraordinary drought operation that is currently in place, the Apalachicola River and the Apalachicola Bay have suffered considerably while water use in Georgia remains practically unrestricted and the Flint River water cons - consumption continues to be unabated. The State of Florida should not have to bear the full brunt of this problem. Could you respond to that please?

Tom MacKenzie: Who is the question directed to?

(Margie Menzel): Anyone who - who cares to address the concern of the Florida Congressional Delegation about water restrictions.

(Colonel Journes): Okay I will, this is (Colonel Journes). My only comment to that from the Corps standpoint, Corps of Engineers' and - and being a federal entity do not have any- any say in - in restrictions and water restrictions. That would be a state driven event.

(Margie Menzel): But isn't it part of your brief to look out for the overall health of the entire river system?

(Colonel Journes): Well absolutely. We manage to the best that we can the water that is in the basin for - for a variety of purposes and we do that. But the aspect of conservation is not an aspect under the federal purview

Coordinator: Does that conclude your question?

(Margie Menzel): Does that conclude mine individually?

Coordinator: Yes.

(Margie Menzel): Well I'm only given one follow-up but I have more if there's time.

Coordinator: There are no further questions at this time if you want to continue.

(Margie Menzel): Okay sure. Now I notice that you're looking at the overall health of - of - of - at - at - at what's going to happen to these particular endangered species but the overall health of the Apalachicola basin is contingent upon a mixture of high and low water and fresh and saltwater. Since the - the levels that you all are talking about are the lowest that we've had historically, aren't you afraid that there will be damage done to the overall conditions of the Apalachicola River Basin?

Sam Hamilton: This is Sam Hamilton of Fish and Wildlife Service. Let me take a shot at it and then maybe turn it to the Corps. You know, the Apalachicola Bay like most (estuaries) is an (estuary) because you have a fine balance of fresh water and salt water in that system. And - and, you know, one of the things that, you know, definitely needs continued research and information gathered on is the amount of freshwater at different times of the year to sustain that wonderful fishery that - that people know so well in the Apalachicola.

The water that is associated with this biological opinion is - is tied to really four species and that's what we were looking at and so we wrote a biological opinion under a federal law that guides us to look at the effect at the Corps operation on these four species. Having said that a much bigger question is how much water beyond just those four species are needed - is needed to sustain that estuary at the level people have grown accustomed to and I think that therein lies the bigger question that needs to be dealt with and then more comprehensive water planning that the Corps going to do in the coming years, that's part of it. The other part of it that (Colonel Journe) mentioned is that, you know, the Corps has the authority to store water and allocate storage but it's the states responsibility for the water.

And, you know, that continuing dialogue and that continuing need for the three states to come together in an equitable allocation in among - among those states to ensure that these competing interests including Apalachicola Bay are protected over the long term. So it's a long term question that the Corps has a role through its - its program but I would see through its water manual process but even more importantly I think a lot of that responsibility lies with its state to come to some agreement on the allocation of that water.

(Colonel Journe) do you have anything to add to that?

(Colonel Journes): Well, I think no, I think that highlights it from my perspective. Like we mentioned earlier I think we all recognize there just is not enough water in - in the basin, in the system to satisfy all competing needs and therein lies the challenge so I agree with your comments and the challenge we all face.

(Margie Menzel): Is there anyway if - that - it seems likely that the saline content of the water in the Bay - of the water in the Bay grows to a point where it can't sustain oysters and shrimp and so forth, you know, this has happened before. A lot of those beds are kind of hanging by a thread now, is there a - a way for this IOP to increase the flows in order to reduce the saline content in the Bay?

Sam Hamilton: This is Sam Hamilton again with Fish and Wildlife and again, you know, maybe some of this would be better addressed by the Corps and their operating plan but, you know, the - the shrimp and oysters that are found in Apalachicola Bay are - are the result of that fresh water salt water system that has evolved over time. Realizing that certain times of the year we have low flow and higher salinities and then and for example in the summer and the early fall and then in the winter time and early spring you get higher fresh water flows as we did this year. Very high flows coming out of the Flint River system and - and to some degree out of the Chattahoochee system that hit Apalachicola Bay so you had that influx of - of fresh water. I think a key point is that we're coming off one of the record droughts of all time and of course that's part of the natural cycle and salt water and salinities go up during those times.

The real - I think the real issue for the ACF system is that - that you need to look at the long view and some of the projections are that we're going to see a 27% increase in the next decade I believe of municipal and industrial demands on that system. So as General Schroedel has mentioned there's a limited amount of water, how you allocate that water is going to be very critical and

certainly taking a look at how much fresh water, I think that's something we need to continue to do more research on and - and more evaluation and analysis. How much water needs to hit Apalachicola Bay in order to sustain that fishery and we - we won't get at that overnight and - and my hope is that either through the manual process or through continued discussions through the three states, you know, we can - we can allocate - have that water allocated for that purpose.

Man: Sir from the Corps standpoint I would just add my comments that I certainly concur and just underscore again that the scope and intense of the current revised IOP effort was towards as you and General Schroedel indicated early on was focused towards those four listed endangered species and that was - was the focal point of - of the structure of the current document.

(Margie Menzel): There's not really a contingency for what happens if the Bay gets in trouble?

(Colonel Journes): This plan as written right now does not incorporate a - any particular measures for - for going beyond - it's outside of the scope to - to have any kind of an imbedded plan for contingency for I think you say the high salinity or other type of aspects that may come about.

Sam Hamilton: But I think - I think one of the items that we talked about related to the water planning in the manual is using an adaptive approach and - and what that means is that as new information comes in changes can be made to - to this plan if its - if its deemed there's something, you know, out of the ordinary that we didn't consider. And - and I would agree that, you know, through this development of the manual for the ACF and updating it all the new information coming in on salinities and what effect it will a - will be a factor in the ultimate plan that's developed.

(Margie Menzel): Does (unintelligible) have any recourse at some point? Is this a done deal if Congressman (Boyd) and Senator (Nelson) wanted to pursue, is there any recourse that they would have to get you all to reconsider?

Sam Hamilton: I'm sorry, Congress always has legislative oversight and, you know, they may choose to exercise that at some point but, you know, this - there are procedures that we go through under the Endangered Species Act. We think we've followed those procedures according to the law; the Corps laid out their plan, I think did a good job trying to balance the competing interest and then gave us that plan to evaluate. We evaluated that plan looking at those four species, used the best science that was available to us, we - we got everything that we could get from the states. Other scientists, universities and the information we collected ourselves, you know, this non-jeopardy opinion we think is - is supported by the facts.

Now, you know, the Endangered Species Act always offers the opportunity to litigate and - and on the ACF system, we've got a pretty good track record of being litigated so, you know, that's always a recourse through the court system. But again we feel pretty good about the information about the decisions that we made based on the information we had at hand today to make that decision.

Coordinator: The next question comes from (Ken Sigoura) of the Atlanta General Constitution.

(Ken Sigoura): (Unintelligible) my first question is with this non-jeopardy opinion I guess it that doesn't mean that this IOP is binding and so when does this take - go into effect?

(Colonel Journes): It went into effect when we delivered the opinion to the Corps last night.

(Ken Sigoura): And how does that change the amount of waters being released from - from Lanier from where it was before?

Sam Hamilton: Currently right now it does not change the amount of water at all. Minimum releases are being made from Lanier as they have been for the past several weeks to meet Atlanta Municipal water supply needs and water quality downstream.

(Ken Sigoura): Okay and before mention was made I think from Mr. Hamilton about - about different species and how they're affected. Could you go over it again, I didn't - I think you gave numbers of - of I guess of - of those animals that will be affected and I think we went over given an amount of time or - or like a year or can you give a little more detail into that.

General Schroedel: I'll try to do that and Gail Carmody if you're on you might be able to help - help me out a little bit but, you know, this biological opinion that we wrote is for five years and so we evaluated the hydrology that the Corps has given us and the likelihood of changes to the natural flows that are out there, both high and low, and as we completed that analysis our best estimate of the loss would be that there would be nine potentially up to 9% of the fat three-ridge mussel potentially lost, 9% of the population.

We also estimated that the other two mussels, the purple bankclimber we estimated approximately 200 of those would be lost and then 100 of the slabshell, the Chipola slabshell. The - the Gulf sturgeon is a little more difficult to quantify and - and so, you know, we didn't actually come up with an estimate of the number of sturgeon that would actually be taken in the event that flows have to rapidly decline under some scenario. Gail, I don't

know if you want to add to that in terms of quantifying the effect on the listed species?

Gail Carmody: Yes I can. Just to verify a bit more is what a biological opinion does is to compare a projected future to what the conditions that are out there today. So for the purposes of the mussel, we believe there could be a one time take of these mussels if flows are reduced to 4,500 cfs, in other words we expect that's it's reasonably certain to occur in this continuing drought that the Corps may have to reduce flows to 4,500 one time in the next five years. The result of that one time reduction of flows will be the loss of 21,000 fat three-ridge mussels, 200 of the purple bankclimber and 100 of the Chipola slabshell. On the other hand during the spring of each of the next five years we concerned about rapid flow rates that may occur in exposed Gulf sturgeon's eggs and larvae. And we're going to continue to work with the Corps on the exact operational procedures that may minimize that particular take.

(Ken Sigoura): What percent of the other two mussels would that be?

Gail Carmody: We don't have a specific population estimate for those two. We believe those numbers are small relative to the overall population.

(Ken Sigoura): Smaller than 9%?

Gail Carmody: Correct.

(Ken Sigoura): Okay.

Coordinator: The next question comes from (Daniel Cusik) from (Green Wire).

(Daniel Cusik): Alright, thanks for taking my question. Gail you just touched on my question a little bit, just want to follow-up. Twenty one thousand individuals on the - the fat three-ridge strikes me as a large number. You say it's 9%, is there a threshold above which Fish and Wildlife would have had to come up with a jeopardy opinion based on percentages or based on raw numbers and how close were these numbers to actually resulting in a jeopardy opinion?

Gail Carmody: What our analysis did was to take a look at frequency of occurrence and if it were to become a chronic effect down to 4,500 that would be significant for the population. If there's a potential to have to go lower than 4,500 we believe that would also be significant for the population. So this one time event that 4,500 cfs we believe is non-jeopardy.

(Daniel Cusik): A quick follow-up. That assumes a one time event over five years, if - if a 4,500 cfs scenario were to occur, more than once, would that significantly change the view of Fish and Wildlife in terms of its jeopardy versus non-jeopardy opinion?

Gail Carmody: We'd have to evaluate that at the time relative to what we know about the species and what may or may not have happen if in the one time event. We did do some analysis of some additional events into the longer term that are described in the biological opinion.

(Daniel Cusik): Just very quickly. Does 9% of a species population is that a significant number as far as Fish and Wildlife services is concerned? I realize you've determined as non-jeopardy but 9% is - strikes me as a - as an endangered species a fairly high number.

Gail Carmody: It's a large number. Remember there's a certain amount of mortality that goes on every year as part of a population and in this case when we evaluated the

adult survival and recruitment compared to this particular one time event, our conclusion was no jeopardy.

(Daniel Cusik): Thanks.

Coordinator: The next question comes from (Jim Strickland) from the (WSB) Television.

(Jim Strickland): Hi this is just some logistical questions because I work in television and the conference call doesn't really a lot of good in terms of getting faces on TV. Is there anybody available to speak on camera in Atlanta this afternoon? A real logistical question.

Tom MacKenzie: Jim, this is Tom MacKenzie we can help you with that.

(Jim Strickland): Tom I'm going to need a Corps sound as well as just FWS sound. Is that a doable thing? Can somebody coordinate that and can it happen at the Lake or downtown?

Tom MacKenzie: (Rob) or (Pat)?

(Rob Holland): I think we can work that. I'm available this afternoon if no one else is so, yeah we can work it. Be easier downtown for me.

(Jim Strickland): All right, who is this speaking?

(Rob Holland): This is (Rob Holland) with the Corps.

(Jim Strickland): Hey (Rob), I just left you a voice mail.

(Rob Holland): Okay.

(Jim Strickland): Okay, fair enough. Let me - I'm going to start heading down to your offices on (Persight). Is that okay?

(Rob Holland): Sure. Why don't I call you when I get back to my office and we'll make it more specific because it's hard with security around here to deal with interviews and...?

(Jim Strickland): Got you. So you're not at the office now?

(Rob Holland): I'm at the office but I'm not at my desk.

(Jim Strickland): Got you.

(Rob Holland): Call that number again in 20 minutes or so, we'll talk.

(Jim Strickland): Okay. Thanks.

Tom MacKenzie: And (Jim) we're out on (Claremont) so if you can pop up here that would be more effective for us.

(Jim Strickland): Are you out by where the FBI is Tom?

Tom MacKenzie: Yeah, pretty much close. We can walk you in when you get tighter.

(Jim Strickland): All right, just give me a street address and I apologize for taking up everybody's time with the logistics. Give me a street address Tom.

Tom MacKenzie: 1875 (Century).

(Jim Strickland): Yeah.

Tom MacKenzie: Call my cell at 678-296-6400.

(Jim Strickland): Thanks - thanks man.

Tom MacKenzie: Estimated time will get you squared away with (Noreen Walsh) who will be discussing this issue with you.

(Jim Strickland): I expect I'll go downtown first and then since I have to head out to the Lake, I'll be up by 85 so I'll - I'll hit the Corps first and then I'll hit you guys on my way to the Lake. Fair enough?

Tom MacKenzie: Good to go.

(Jim Strickland): Thank you.

Tom MacKenzie: Bye, bye.

Coordinator: There are no further questions at this time.

Tom MacKenzie: Okay if there are no further questions, I'd like to thank you all for joining us. Again I invite any media or any other interested parties to take a look at our Web site for additional background information as well as downloadable photos there available for your use should you desire. Additionally - additional questions can be handled on the Corps side by (Rob Holland) at 404-562-5011, Gail Carmody from the Fish and Wildlife Service, Panama City is at 850-769-0552 extension 225 or myself at 404-679-7291. Give another and any other alibis for questions operator?

Coordinator: There are no further questions at this time.

Tom MacKenzie: Okay. Thank you all very much. Take care.

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