



News Release

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Corps Releases Missouri River Draft Annual Operating Plan

OMAHA – The Army Corps of Engineers today released for public comment its draft 2005-2006 Annual Operating Plan for the Missouri River. The plan provides transparency to the public on the water release schedules that impact river use.

The draft plan proposes two “spring pulses” to satisfy requirements of the Endangered Species Act, provided there is sufficient water in the main stem reservoirs. To conserve water, the pulses would be delayed until 2007 if there were not at least 36.5 million acre feet (MAF) of water stored in the reservoir system on March 1 and May 1. Current storage is 36.2 MAF. Storage peaked at 38.9 MAF in August. Increased reservoir levels are dependent on rain this fall and snow on the plains and in the mountains this winter.

The Corps also released a draft plan for spring pulses in subsequent years. It is proposed that once a spring pulse has occurred, the minimum storage required for pulses in future years will be increased to 40 MAF. This 2-stage approach was developed to address needs of the endangered pallid sturgeon population in the river below Gavins Point Dam.

The draft plan also describes the overall management plan for the dams and reservoirs. It anticipates that there will be only minimum flows for the 2006 navigation season and it could be shortened 15 to 58 days, depending on runoff this winter and spring. A final determination on season length will be made on July 1, 2006.

Releases from Gavins Point may be cycled during May to encourage the least terns and piping plovers to nest high on the sandbars. They will be adjusted in June to meet navigation flows through mid-August when the birds begin annual migration south.

Steady to rising reservoir levels during the spring fish spawn are likely if there is normal or above normal runoff. However, continued drought conditions may not make that possible at all the upper three reservoirs. To the extent reasonably possible, the Corps will set releases at Garrison Dam to result in a steady to rising pool during April and May. The ability to provide such conditions depends on the volume, time and distribution of the runoff from melting snow on the plains and in the mountains of Montana and Wyoming.

The carefully measured pulses from the reservoir system in the spring are intended to mimic the historic ebb and flow of the river to benefit the spawning of the endangered pallid sturgeon. While smaller than the spring rises that this ancient fish adapted to over the millennia, the pulses are considered essential to the successful reproduction of the fish.

The Amended 2003 Biological Opinion published by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service identified pulses in the spring from Gavins Point as part of the Reasonable and Prudent Alternative to avoid jeopardizing the continued existence of the pallid sturgeon.

Using input from the work done this spring and summer by the Missouri River Plenary Group of 50 regional stakeholders including Tribal representatives and special interest groups, the Corps and Service have closely coordinated on the proposed pulses for 2006. In addition to being included in the operating plan, the Master Water Control Manual will be supplemented to include provisions for spring pulses in subsequent years along with flexibility to allow some modifications based on the results of monitoring and evaluation studies.

Bottomland farmers below the reservoir system have long expressed concern about increased releases in the spring. They fear the additional water increases the risk of flooding of land outside the levees and increases the inability to drain water from protected land because of high river stages.

The 2006 plan maintains the same level of “flood control constraints” currently in the Master Water Control Manual. These are the river levels that act as triggers for reducing releases from Gavins Point during high downstream flows.

The duration of the pulses and the maintaining of the existing flood control constraints will result in minimal increased risk for these farmers. The Corps will continue to work with downstream interests to explore ways to minimize any additional impact to farmland due to the spring pulses.

People along the reservoirs have expressed concerns about water being taken from the reservoirs that could impact Tribal intakes and affect the walleye and rainbow smelt spawn. The timing and duration of the pulses will result in minimal impacts on reservoir storage during times of drought.

In addition, if runoff conditions permit, water may be moved into Fort Randall reservoir early in the spring to provide the water needed for the May pulse, further reducing negative impacts to storage in the three largest reservoirs of Oahe, Garrison and Fort Peck.

As is the case with the downstream impacts, the Corps will continue to discuss potential ways to minimize the impacts of the pulses on reservoir interests. The idea of staging water for the pulses in Fort Randall is one example that resulted from such discussions that have occurred to date.

Features of the 2006 spring rise include:

March Pulse

1. No spring pulse if reservoir storage is 36.5 MAF or less on 1 March
2. Magnitude will be 5,000 cfs added to navigation releases, total release not to exceed 35,000 cfs (Gavins Point Dam powerplant capacity)
3. Pulse will be timed to coincide with the beginning of navigation season
4. Rise to peak of pulse will be approximately 5,000 cfs for one day
5. Peak duration will be 2 days
6. The fall to navigation target flows will occur over 5 days

May Pulse

1. No spring pulse if reservoir storage is 36.5 MAF or less on 1 May
2. Magnitude will be 16,000 cfs above navigation releases if 1 May storage is 54.5 MAF or above. It will be prorated to 12,000 cfs at 40 MAF
3. Magnitude will be adjusted up or down based on the May runoff forecast.
4. The pulse will be initiated between May 1 to 19, based on water temperature below Gavins Point Dam.
5. The rise to the peak of the pulse will occur at a rate of 6,000 cfs per day
6. The peak duration will be 2 days.
7. The fall to navigation flows will be 30% over 2 days followed by a proportional reduction over the next 8 days.

The public meetings will open with presentations on this year's runoff, reservoir storage, and the management of the six dams and reservoirs. These will be followed by descriptions of the regulation for the remainder of 2005 and the year 2006 for flood control, hydropower, navigation, irrigation, recreation, water supply, water quality, fish and wildlife and endangered species for a wide variety of runoff and storage conditions.

The public meeting schedule is:

Nov. 14	1 p.m., Omaha, Neb.	Northwestern Division HQ, 12565 West Center Rd
Nov. 14	7 p.m., Nebraska City, Neb.	Steinhart Lodge, Steinhart Park Road
Nov. 15	7 p.m., Kansas City, Mo.	Embassy Suites, 7640 NW Tiffany Springs Pkwy
Nov. 16	1 p.m., St. Louis, Mo.	Crowne Plaza-St. Louis Airport, 11228 Lone Eagle Dr
Nov. 16	7 p.m., Jefferson City, Mo.	Capitol Plaza Hotel, 415 West McCarty Street
Nov. 17	1 p.m., Pierre, S.D.	Best Western Ramkota, 920 West Sioux Ave
Nov 17	7 p.m., Bismarck, N.D.	Doublewood Inn, 1400 E. Interchange Ave
Nov 18	1 p.m., Glasgow, Mont.	Cottonwood Inn, Highway 2 East

The Draft 2005-06 Annual Operating Plan with a detailed description of the spring pulses is now available. It is posted on the Northwestern Division website: www.usace.army.mil and is available in hard copy by writing to: Water Management Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 12565 West Center Road, Omaha, NE 68144. Comments on the draft plan and the supplement to the Master Water Control Manual will be taken during the series of public meetings and in writing and via e-mail through December 1.