



NEWS

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Letter from Secretary Kempthorne, Chairman Connaughton to Governors Regarding Southeast Water Negotiations

WASHINGTON, D.C.- The following is the text of a letter sent last night by Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne and Council on Environmental Quality Chairman Jim Connaughton to the governors of Alabama, Georgia and Florida regarding the water negotiations among the three states.

Thank you for the personal role you have played in our productive discussions over the past months regarding management of the Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa and Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint river basins in the southeastern United States. We mutually committed our staffs and ourselves to good faith negotiations dedicated to exploring both short-term and long-term solutions and found that it was an effort well-made. The short-term solution we implemented together in November 2007 has carried us forward and has enabled us to manage the situation well to date. As you know, this arrangement is valid until June 1, 2008.

We are encouraged as some of the staffs have observed that we have made more progress in 3 months than at any time during the last 18 years. We have achieved some, but not all, of our objectives. We have gained a better understanding of the system and the interactions of the system, which has assisted us in narrowing a significant number of issues that divide the States. Though the remaining issues are still quite difficult, we are all still jointly committed to complete resolution.

As the mutually agreed upon deadline of March 1, 2008, is now upon us, we understand and accept the following path forward.

We will now begin a process to review interim operations that will replace the current program before it expires on June 1, 2008. Federal agencies may subsequently issue further revisions as may be warranted by Federal law, changing hydrological conditions, and new information. Any future changes in interim operations will be necessary only until the water control plans and manuals are revised. That revision process is now beginning and will be organized by the Army Corps of Engineers with support from the other Federal agencies with relevant expertise and jurisdiction.

If your collective judgment changes at any time prior to complete revision of water control plans and manuals, and you would like to reconvene technical collaboration on interim operations, we will welcome your collaboration. At the same time, the Army Corps of Engineers and the cooperating Federal agencies will maximize the opportunities for the States to participate in the revision process for water control manuals and plans.

We understand, and it is unfortunate, that in parallel to our decision making on interim and revised operations, you will all be working through the Federal courts. It is our hope that developments in the courts will not frustrate further progress in resolving the remaining technical issues we face together. The revised operational decisions will integrate important information and perspectives gained from our negotiations, but regrettably, it will

necessarily be a solution being directed to the States instead of our much hoped for solution coming from the States.

We appreciate your dedication to these difficult discussions, and the collegial and cooperative relationships we have forged through this process will endure for the duration of this Administration. As always, our door remains open to continue our work together.