

## **Apalachicola River Use Without Dredging**

**The Apalachicola River has played a major role in the development and history of the area which runs approximately 107 miles below Jim Woodruff Dam to Apalachicola Bay and Gulf of Mexico. Consideration of deauthorizing the commercial navigation channel as a federally authorized channel has extracted numerous false perceptions regarding the limitations on use that might be imposed without channel maintenance activities being carried out by the Corps. This paper is to provide an accurate explanation of use of the river by boats compatible with the natural channel dimensions of the river.**

**Historically, recreational boat use on the Apalachicola River has not been dependent on the channel maintenance activities of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Recreational boats have traversed the Apalachicola and Chipola rivers during recent droughts at the lowest water stages without incident. In addition, use of the Chipola River is common without maintenance. Modern commercial barge traffic on the other hand requires dredging for use of the river during lower water stages requiring millions of dollars expenditure by the Federal Government and causing significant environmental damage. Here are some facts:**

- **A channel sufficient to accommodate most recreational boats exists without dredging.** Most recreation boats under 20' draft no more than 20"-24". The largest recreational boats to historically have traversed the river are 18'x 60' houseboats which travel the length of the river from Lake Seminole to Apalachicola Bay. These boats draw approximately 3'-3.5' (require 3.5'-4.0' of water depth).
- **A controlling depth of 3.5' - 4' naturally exists at the lowest river stages.** That relates to the shallowest depth for a channel. This is without dredging over the past two years and approximates a natural channel depth at low water.
- **Alternatives exist for other channel maintenance activities.** Besides dredging, channel maintenance activities include removing snags from the river channel, setting channel markers along the point bars and shallow stretches of the channel, and operation and maintenance of the locks through the dams. Solutions to the loss of these maintenance activities for navigation are available.
- **The Riverkeeper organizations of the Chattahoochee and Apalachicola Rivers will work diligently to determine a viable means of maintaining a recreational channel. Some of the potential solutions are listed below:**
  - **There is precedent in Florida on the Ocklawaha River where state government (Department of Environmental Protection) maintains channel markers in a non-federally authorized channel and removes snag.** This is accomplished under contract with a private company. Furthermore, privately maintained channel markers are common around the State of Florida. Charts and

local knowledge of bays, rivers and lakes provide ample information for reasonably experienced boaters to navigate those passes and channels with due caution.

- **The Federal Government has let private contracts or provided grants to local governments for navigable waters to be cleared of logs, debris, and snags on an as needed basis.**
- **Locks should remain operational without the river dredging component of the Apalachicola River (see [attached draft of RARE Act](#)).** There is precedent for Corps maintenance of lock without authorized channels. Furthermore, in the past, locks were manned 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, year round. Under a reduced operation schedule, locks are now operated at certain hours during the day to allow river traffic to pass up and down stream.
- **If commercial traffic were to continue to use the river during a higher water season, the lock operation could be increased on demand as it is now.** Up and down bound barge traffic has sufficient advanced notification of arrival times at the locks to make necessary arrangements for the lock operation.

**The bottom line is that use of the river may require a bit more caution by operators not familiar with the River, but local use should not be impacted. There may be increased use if fishing improves to a point similar to days gone by when small fishing lodges with guides were more prevalent. That scenario could also provide a significant boost to local economies. This type of development in the basin coupled with local contractors working on floodplain and slough restoration projects offer a real environmental and economic improvement to the Florida portion of the Apalachicola Basin.**