

August 11, 2005

Colleen M. Castille, Secretary
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
3900 Commonwealth Boulevard M.S. 49
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Re: Opposition to Renewal of the Apalachicola River Channel Maintenance Permit
(Requested by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, File No. 0129424-005-DF)

Dear Secretary Castille:

This letter is to request that you take the final action to deny the referenced application to dredge the Apalachicola River. Justification for this decision lies predominantly in the lack of benefits to the public interest of the citizens of Florida. The additional information provided by the Corps has not altered or offered sufficient additional evidence that would change the facts previously presented by our organization and the other state and federal agencies that are involved in the review or coordination of this project. These agencies include the Northwest Florida Water Management District, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Geological Service.

Over the fifty years that this project has been authorized, there has been compelling evidence that the project is environmentally indefensible and economically unjustified. Statements by the Corps that decisions by the State of Florida have caused a loss or reduction in barge traffic are misleading. The implication is that the forestalled maintenance actions would have allowed the channel to be available more of the time and that benefits would increase. A more accurate statement is that the benefits to the commercial barge users would increase, but the overall project benefits are still questionable if additional expenditures are included. The Navigational Element of the Comprehensive Study for the ACF Basin called for a one time expenditure of over \$48,000,000 and \$9,000,000 in annual expenditures. Furthermore, the state agency actions were taken deliberately after considerable discussion and analysis. More importantly, those actions were based on the steadfast goal to maintain the natural functions and productivity of this relatively pristine system.

It is indeed a rare opportunity when our state is so unified to protect this National Treasure for which we have responsibility. It is Apalachicola Riverkeeper's intent to go to Washington, D.C. this fall with you and other representatives from Florida to request that Congress enact legislation that will do away with dredging and provide for restoration of the Apalachicola River as suggested in the Restore the Apalachicola River Ecosystem (RARE) Act.

Current authorizations are out dated and have constrained the Corps ability to consider viable alternatives to existing management and operations. The study we provided to DEP, An Evaluation of the Availability of the Federally Authorized Navigation Channel on the Apalachicola River without Maintenance Dredging, provides a sound basis for these discussions and reconsideration of authorization for a project that will be in Florida's interest while providing reasonable benefits for upstream users.

The aforementioned state agencies have already begun the process of determining what restoration will be needed. Information relating the causes of the most significant changes in the Apalachicola's hydrology and geomorphology are critical to planning restoration actions and will ensure that actions to restore are done with clear understanding of cause and result. It is to Florida's advantage to lead these actions to best serve our economic base which is enhanced by a healthy functioning natural ecosystem on the Apalachicola River and Bay. One estimate of the economic value of this national treasure is \$5 billion per year.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue. Please consider the lasting environmental and economic impacts for Florida and the Nation in protecting and restoring such a national treasure as the Apalachicola Ecosystem. Clearly, the first step of that is denial of this permit.

Best regards,

Dan Tonsmeire
Executive Director/Riverkeeper

Cc: Governor Jeb Bush
Speaker Allan Bense
Senator Al Lawson
Representative Will Kendrick
Senator Bill Nelson
Representative Allen Boyd
Doug Barr - Executive Director, Northwest Florida Water Management District
Ken Haddad - Director, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Ronald O. Williams - Federal Permit Coordinator, Dept. of Environmental Protection