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Alabama River Navigation – The US Army Corps of Engineers and Alabama Power Company continue to manage water flows in their respective reservoirs in the Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa basin based on drought plans. In a 9 October press release, Mobile District of the Corps stated: “Reservoir inflows are running below normal for this time of year and the Corps is expecting to begin dropping the lower reservoirs if conditions remain the same. We are currently releasing only the minimum required to meet downstream needs.” Inflows at Allatoona over the past two months have been 16-22% of historic average while at Carters inflows have been approximately 6% of average. Combined releases from both federal reservoirs have been about 950 cfs daily. In the meantime, Alabama Power, while still officially targeting flow releases of 4176 cfs (a 10% reduction from normal operations) into the Alabama from the Coosa and Tallapoosa, has been able to release flows in excess of that target due to some rains and the scheduled lowering of reservoirs toward winter levels. At the two federal hydropower dams on the Alabama (RF Henry and Millers Ferry), Mobile District’s flow releases have been about normal, but there still is not enough water in the system to maintain a consistent level of flow at Claiborne. In September and so far in October, the Claiborne Lower gauge readings have ranged between 6 to 8 feet, yielding channel depths from 7 to 9 feet.

Dredging operations below Claiborne Dam were completed in late August with the channel being excavated to 150 feet in width and nine feet. Mobile District did an excellent job in managing the dredge *E Stroud* as Tropical Storm Fay in mid-August threatened to undo all the work done to that point. In fact, high waters produced by the storm stopped operations entirely and would not allow the vessel to move, but an after-storm survey by the Corps revealed minimal sedimentation caused by the storm and the *E Stroud* completed its work quickly.

Hats off to Mobile District for a job well done.

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Industry Update - Dixie Pellets is moving weekly four-barge tows loaded to seven feet (1000-1100 tons per barge), but plans to go to nine feet (1500 tons) as depths below Claiborne increase with the winter rains. The company is currently at about 60% production capacity while working through some unexpected production issues associated with the complex process of blending hard and soft woods with varying moisture content into a usable pellet.

Given the barge “light” loads, Dixie continues to use both barge and truck to get the pellets to Mobile for shipment to Rotterdam. Truck rates per ton are about 2 ½ to 3 times those of barges, depending on fuel prices, so obviously the more that can be loaded onto the barge, the more cost effective.

The most recent shipment of Dixie pellets to Europe last week departed with a load of about 27,000 metric tons. Four silos under construction at Theodore as a holding facility for pellets awaiting shipment should be completed by next January. Currently, pellets are stored at Theodore aboard part of the Dixie’s fleet of 24 barges.

The slumping housing market has affected **Roberts Sand & Gravel**, which normally would move four to six jumbo barges a month to the Gulf Coast from the Selma area, but has seen demand for aggregate in the Gulf region take a dramatic drop, enough that Mark Roberts temporarily moved his operation to the Houston area over the past few months working in Hurricane Ike relief efforts.

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America’s Marine Highway Program – The US Department of Transportation has announced an initiative to reduce congestion on landside (road and rail) infrastructure: short sea transportation. With the prospect of transportation requirements doubling over the next 15 years, DOT is proposing the Marine Highway Program (MHP) with the objective of putting more cargo and passengers onto the inland and coastal waterways to take advantage of an underutilized transportation mode that boasts significant economic and environmental benefits.

In a press release on 9 October, DOT identified transportation congestion as one of the single largest threats to the American economy. American drivers annually lose 3.7 billion hours and consume 2.3 billion gallons of fuel just sitting in traffic jams, at a cost of \$200 billion. Head of the Maritime Administration, Sean Connaughton, charged with managing the program, points out that the US economy is dependent on its transportation system, and for that system to be effective, the US has no choice but to find ways to relieve that congestion. Moving more cargo and passengers onto waterways can help relieve the gridlock.

America’s network of inland waterways currently moves about 625 million tons of domestic cargo each year, but has the capacity to accommodate much more while offering significant advantages in fuel savings, load capacity, safety, and emission of pollutants. The MHP is an attempt to get public and private entities to recognize those benefits.

Key, however, is the participation of public agencies, such as State Departments of Transportation and MPO’s, as well as private industry. The MHP offers federal resource and

financial incentives for participation. The Federal Register notice of the MHP can be found at [AMH_reg_100908.pdf](#).

In Alabama, the Department of Transportation has no staff function with the responsibility of overseeing inland waterways and pursuing a project such as the MHP. Preliminary contact with the ALDOT staff about any state action regarding the program revealed an apparent lack of interest in being involved.

For the last two years, the Coalition of Alabama Waterway Associations has supported a bill in the Alabama State Legislature to establish a waterways advisory board for the Director of ALDOT. The bill passed the House of Representatives both times, but died in the Senate. Let us hope that oversight can be corrected in the upcoming legislative session.

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Alabama Sturgeon – The US Fish & Wildlife Service has not yet set a date for the public hearing requested by the Alabama-Tombigbee Rivers Coalition on the Service’s proposal to designate a critical habitat for the Alabama sturgeon. A Mobile Press-Register article of October 28 stated the Service has delayed release of the required economic analysis of the proposal until mid-November while issues associated with certain parameters of the proposal are sorted out. A public hearing most likely will follow shortly after release of the economic study.

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National Waterways Conference – The NWC will hold its annual conference in New Orleans, November 5-7, at the Omni Royal Orleans Hotel. The program will feature discussion on the public value of waterway projects and how the presence of a waterway is a major factor in a region’s growth. More information can be found at <http://www.waterways.org/>.

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ACT Water Control Manual – Mobile District of the US Army Corps of Engineers held a series of scoping meetings in September within the ACT basin to receive public comments on issues related to updating the ACT water control manual. Meetings were held in Kennesaw and Rome in Georgia, and Gadsden and Montgomery in Alabama. CARIA submitted written comments with the following recommendations:

- a) Structure the ACT Water Control Manual to promote continuous, efficient, and effective operations and maintenance of the Alabama River navigation channel;
- b) Renew the agreement between the Mobile District and the Alabama Power Company to provide the minimum weekly flow of 32,480 dsf (4,640 cfs daily average);
- c) Incorporate a drought operations plan that balances all purposes of the ACT system;
- d) Improve the reliability of the Alabama River navigation channel by modifying existing or constructing new training works below Claiborne Dam;
- e) Ensure Alabama River tributaries are sufficiently maintained to contribute to flow requirements below Claiborne Dam.

Mobile District will also prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) required by the National Environmental Policy Act. The process to complete the manual and the EIS is projected to take 2 to 3 years. A parallel effort is underway to update the manual for the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint system as well.

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Lake Martin Relicensing Program – Alabama Power Company is in the process of building its application to relicense the Lake Martin project. Among the preliminary issues is a proposal to raise the winter pool perhaps by as much as five feet to an elevation of 485 and to begin filling toward the summer pool of 490 feet earlier in the year. The summer pool would then be maintained until later in the year, perhaps through October or November, rather than the current date of 1 September.

Without the benefit of a model evaluation, the concern from a navigation view is that the period August through November is the driest part of the year and is typically when flows in the Alabama are the lowest. Holding back water in Martin to accommodate a higher pool could possibly exacerbate the low flow conditions on the Alabama during that period, which, of course, means lower depths in the navigation channel.

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Alabama Scenic River Trail – The Alabama Scenic River Trail, which was recently designated a “National Recreation Trail” by the US National Park Service, presented a \$1000 check to the first person to paddle the entire 631 miles of the river trail. Ardie Olson of Cumming, Georgia, crossed the Alabama-Georgia state line on the Coosa River in his 32-pound, 21-foot sea kayak on October 10, portaged his boat around the dams on the Coosa, negotiated the rapids of the Lower Coosa, worked his way through the locks on the Alabama River, and finished at Fort Morgan in Mobile Bay at 11:59 AM on October 23. That’s 631 miles in 12 days, an average of a little more than 50 miles a day – quite a feat!! Upon receiving the check, which was advertised as to be given to the first person to paddle the entire route on one continuous journey, Ardie promptly donated the money back to the ASRT in recognition of the tremendous support he received all along the way.

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Jerry L Sailors
President, CARIA
(334)265-5744