Water Level Management Update

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STATUS UPDATE FOR POOLS 6 AND 9

Pool 6 Update

Project Description

The St. Paul District, Corps of Engineers, in cooperation with the Water Level Management Task Force (WLMTF), is proposing to implement a minor drawdown of Pool 6 in the summer of 2003. The drawdown at Lock and Dam 6 was originally proposed between 0.5 to 1.0 foot below the normal elevation of 644.5 mean sea level (msl) with maximum drawdown at Winona of 0.5 foot or 4.9 on the Winona gage. A drawdown in this range would expose between 500 and 1000 acres of mudflats to favorable conditions for the growth and reproduction of a vital aquatic vegetation, particularly emergent vegetation. These vegetation beds are important as food and shelter for most fish and wildlife populations on the river. The drawdown is proposed to be conducted between June 16, 2003, and September 15, 2003, when river discharges are between 26,000 and 71,000 cubic feet per second (cfs).

The decision concerning the level of drawdown to implement within this range depends on navigation channel depth surveys and main channel dredging during the spring of 2003. The decision also factors in comments provided at public meetings and the written comment period.

As a result of public comments brought forward about recreational access depth in Straight Slough the proposed drawdown level has been altered. The Water Level Management Task Force now proposes a compromise to reduce water levels at the dam between 0.5 and 1.0 foot **without** any drawdown at the Winona Gage. Low gage reading at Winona is 5.4 and the managed water levels for the drawdown go below that level. This plan can be implemented when flows are between 33,000 cfs and 71,000 cfs so it would limit the chance of providing favorable conditions for the drawdown from 50% to 35%.

The effects on commercial navigation facilities in Pool 6 would be expected to be minimal as this the drawdown. The new proposed drawdown scenario for Pool 6 should eliminate any recreation access problems for Straight Slough.

Coordination

The recommended drawdown was planned and coordinated through the Water Level Management Task Force of the River Resources Forum. Thus, all of the key river resource management agencies, especially the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the various State Departments of Natural Resources, were involved in the planning process.

A public meeting was held on February 12, 2003, in Winona, Minnesota. The meeting was attended by 20 members of the public. Meeting attendees were generally supportive of the drawdown or neutral. A few individuals expressed concern with the potential for the drawdown to affect boat access in the lower end of Straight Slough at about river mile 726.5. The amount of drawdown was adjusted based on these comments. An additional public meeting was held on April 8, 2003, in Trempealeau, WI. Meeting attendees were supportive of the proposed drawdown.

The letter report and environmental assessment were sent to affected and interested agencies, organizations, media, and libraries. In addition, a notice of availability was sent to approximately 130 private citizens.

For Further Information

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Pool 9 Update

Project Description

The St. Paul District, Corps of Engineers, in cooperation with the Water Level Management Task Force (WLMTF), is proposing to implement a minor drawdown of Pool 9 (1.0 foot), with the constraint of no drawdown at the Lansing gage, or 7.7 gage reading. The drawdown is proposed to be conducted between June 16, 2003, and September 15, 2003, if river discharges are between 43,000 and 55,000 cubic feet per second.

The project objective is to expose mudflats and create conditions favorable for the reproduction, growth, and vitality of emergent plant species. These exposed mudflats will also undergo chemical and physical changes as a result of the drying process. In Pool 9, a 1.0-foot drawdown will expose 500 to 750 acres to these positive benefits for fish and wildlife habitat.

Due to an Alliant Energy barge fleeting site, the drawdown can only be fully maintained when discharges are between 43,000 and 55,000 cubic feet per second (cfs). The probability of having these conditions in any given year is small, less than 5%. However, even with this constraint, river managers and scientists believe that the drawdown should be attempted to provide habitat benefits, to assess the actual impacts at Alliant Energy, and to determine if the computer-generated acreage for exposed mudflats is accurate.

A one-foot drawdown may create some navigation problems for both commercial and recreational use of Pool 9, but most are manageable. A marginal narrowing of the navigation channel in an area about 12 miles upstream from Lock and Dam 9 is a potential. However, channel surveys will be conducted prior to drawdown to assure proper depth in the main channel. The potential impact at Alliant Energy should be minimized or eliminated by restricting the drawdown to the narrow range river flows and by maintaining a minimum water elevation of 620.0 at the Lansing control point.

The recreational access points have been assessed for depth, and most should remain functional with the drawdown. Two facilities that may be affected more than others are Harris Boat Harbor at Lynxville, Wisconsin and Hyetman's landing on the Iowa side.

volved in the planning process.

A public meeting was held on February 6, 2003, in Lansing, Iowa. The meeting was attended by 30 members of the public, and attendees were generally supportive of the drawdown or neutral. A few individuals expressed concern with any potential effects on Big Lake (located upstream of Lansing), which will not be affected by the drawdown.

The draft Letter Report/Environmental Assessment was sent to affected and interested agencies, organizations, media and libraries. In addition, a notice of availability was sent to approximately 185 private citizens.

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Point of Reference for these articles
River Flows on April 16, 2003

Lock and Dam 6 = 24,800 cfs
(cubic feet per second)
Lock and Dam 9 = 31,700 cfs
(cubic feet per second)

Follow river flows on the St. Paul District website. www.mvp-wc.usace.army.mil Click on the map section corresponding to the portion of river of your interest.