

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

MAINTENANCE DREDGING OF THE ATLANTIC INTRACOASTAL WATERWAY

HORRY, GEORGETOWN, CHARLESTON, COLLETON, AND BEAUFORT COUNTIES, SOUTH CAROLINA

AUGUST 2023

This draft Supplemental Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Charleston District (USACE), pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321- 4370f, and its implementing regulations, 40 C.F.R. §§ 1500-1508 and 33 C.F.R. Part 230, in coordination with Federal and State resource agencies, to update the original analysis of environmental impact and compliance, and to evaluate additional dredged material management alternatives to those in the April 1976 Final Environmental [Impact] Statement and Statement of Findings (FEIS/SOF), *Maintenance Dredging of Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway*. The existing NEPA document provides an evaluation of impacts from operations and maintenance (O&M) of the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway (AIWW) Navigation Project. This EA addresses, among other things, a reduction of the overall adverse impact of AIWW maintenance dredging, as well as beneficial use additions to the disposal (or placement) alternatives originally considered. USACE believes that the changes and associated impacts evaluated in this draft EA are in the net beneficial and reduce overall adverse environmental impact below the level of significance, and that the proposed action does not represent either a substantial change relevant to environmental concerns or present significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) summarizes the results of these evaluations and documents conclusions.

The No Action Alternative represents the most probable future condition if no action is taken. Under the No Action Alternative, USACE would not conduct maintenance dredging. Adoption of this alternative implies acceptance of the existing conditions in the proposed project area.

Alternatives considered for dredged material management of the AIWW were evaluated based on compliance with environmental laws and regulations, compliance with executive orders, impacts to the environment, cost effectiveness, engineering feasibility, and the ability of the alternative to meet the purpose and need of the project. Alternatives were also evaluated for consistency with *the Federal standard* (see 33 C.F.R. Parts 335-338). The Federal standard is the dredged material placement alternative or alternatives identified by USACE which represent the least costly alternatives consistent with sound engineering practices and environmental standards established by the 404(b)(1) evaluation process or ocean dumping criteria. In reviewing alternatives, USACE considered whether they would be technically feasible (engineering); cost effective; and compliant with applicable environmental laws, regulations, and executive orders; and whether they would have less than significant environmental impacts.

Alternative plans to the proposed action include maintaining the AIWW as has been done historically (Alternative B), and the No Action Alternative (Alternative A). The Proposed Action (Alternative C), Alternative B, and the No Action Alternative (Alternative A) were evaluated in detail in the EA. For all alternatives, the potential effects were evaluated, as appropriate.

The recommended plan is the Proposed Action (Alternative C) and includes:

- O&M dredging in the AIWW channel, as needed, utilizing cutterhead pipeline dredging to maintain the federal navigation channel depth of 12 feet, extending from the NC/SC state line to Port Royal Sound, a distance of approximately 212 miles.
- Dredged materials from within the AIWW channel will be placed, as needed, in existing upland DMMA's, existing in-water placement areas, and along the shorelines of Sullivan's Island and Isle of Palms.

SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL EFFECTS: A summary assessment of the potential effects of the recommended plan are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of potential effects of the Proposed Action Alternative

Environments Affected	Insignificant Effects	Insignificant Effects by Mitigation*	Unaffected by Action
Water Quality	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Noise	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Aesthetics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recreation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fish and Wildlife Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Benthic Organisms	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Air Quality	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Threatened and Endangered Species	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Navigation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Climate Change	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Essential Fish Habitat	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hazardous, Toxic & Radioactive Waste	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Cultural Resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Wetlands	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Socioeconomics & Environmental Justice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Coastal Barrier Resources System	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Coastal Zone Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*Insignificant effects by mitigation: For any resources that fall in this category, a description of the required mitigation is included in the paragraphs following this table

All practicable and appropriate means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental effects were analyzed and incorporated into the recommended plan. Best management practices (BMPs) as detailed in the EA will be implemented, if appropriate, to minimize impacts.

USACE proposes measures to avoid and minimize impacts to threatened and endangered species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Section 3.8 of the EA describes the ESA-listed species that may occur in the study area and Section 4.8 of the EA documents the anticipated effects, if any, of the proposed maintenance dredging project on these species. Avoidance and minimization measures, which have been identified include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Adherence to the appropriate PDCs identified in the 2020 South Atlantic Regional Biological Opinion (SARBO).
- The standard manatee conditions will be implemented from April 15 to October 31. The Contractor will be instructed to take necessary precautions to avoid any contact with manatees. If manatees are sighted within 100 yards of the dredging area, all appropriate precautions will be implemented to insure protection of the manatee. The Contractor will stop, alter course, or maneuver as necessary to avoid operating moving equipment (including watercraft) any closer than 100 yards of the manatee. Operation of equipment closer than 50 feet to a manatee will necessitate immediate shutdown of that equipment.
- Adherence to the appropriate reasonable and prudent measures (RPM) and terms and conditions (T&C) of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Biological Opinion upon completion of formal consultation.

Measures identified to avoid and minimize impacts to Essential Fish Habitat include:

- Adherence to the appropriate conservation recommendations and best management practices included in the Programmatic Essential Fish Habitat Consultation for USACE Activities and Projects Regularly Undertaken in South Carolina.

Measures identified to avoid and minimize impacts to Cultural Resources include:

- Adherence to the recommended buffers (avoidance zones) for identified resources near Breach Inlet DMMA and Isle of Palms beneficial use placement areas.

The draft EA and FONSI has been distributed for a 30-day comment and review period. The final EA will address the comments received during this review period. Since USACE has determined that the proposed action would not result in significant adverse individual or cumulative effects to environmental resources or human health and does not represent either a substantial change to the project relevant to environmental concerns or present significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns, the preparation of a supplemental Environmental Impact Statement is not warranted, and the issuance of a FONSI is appropriate. The EA for the proposed action can be downloaded from the internet (in PDF format) at <https://www.sac.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/NEPA-Documents>.

Date _____

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