

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

MAINTENANCE DREDGING OF THE ATLANTIC INTRACOASTAL WATERWAY

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

January 2024

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Charleston District, has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) 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 evaluate newly considered alternatives to actions previously analyzed in the Final Environmental Statement for the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway in South Carolina (AIWW) Navigation Project (USACE 1976). Specifically, the EA updates previous NEPA analysis for the continued operation and maintenance (O&M) of the AIWW Navigation Project, and evaluates impacts associated with alternative methods to increase beneficial use (BU) of dredged materials not previously analyzed by USACE (1976). More specifically, actions covered under the Proposed Action include maintenance to navigation depth of the AIWW navigation channel using cutterhead pipeline dredging and disposal of dredged sediments via pipeline to any individual, or combination thereof, placement areas (i.e., existing upland dredged material management areas, existing open water placement areas, and beneficial use placement along the beaches and nearshore of Sullivan's Island and Isle of Palms). Maintenance dredging intervals and quantities along the 212-mile-long channel vary based on need and availability of funding (see Section 2.5 in the EA). This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) summarizes the result 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 (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 DMMAs, existing open 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input 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 reasonable and prudent measures (RPM) and terms and conditions (T&C) of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Biological Opinion.

In addition to ESA-listed species, USACE proposes measures to avoid and minimize impacts to EFH resources, cultural resources, water quality, and coastal zone resources. Avoidance and minimization measures, which have been identified include, but are not limited to, the following:

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 *2023 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 DMMAs and Isle of Palms beneficial use placement areas.

To date, South Carolina DHEC has not yet issued the Section 401 Water Quality Certification. USACE invoked a partial waiver of the water quality certification requirement allowed under 40 CFR §121.9(b) for the 2024 sediment rehandling and beneficial use project in the Breach Inlet area of the AIWW. The partial waiver applies only to the 2024 sediment rehandling beneficial use project and does not apply to future AIWW O&M dredging activities. For future AIWW O&M dredging activities, assuming the subsequent issuance of a water quality certification, the Corps will comply with all applicable conditions in that water quality certification.

Measures identified to avoid and minimize impacts to coastal zone resources include:

- Adherence to the conditions contained in the 29 September 2023 CZC conditional concurrence.

The draft EA and FONSI were distributed for a 30-day comment and review period. The final EA addresses the comments received during this review period. Since USACE has determined that the proposed action of maintaining the existing navigation channel 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 final supplemental 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_____

Robert W. Nahabedian
Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army
Commander and District Engineer