



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, CHARLESTON DISTRICT
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DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

MAINTENANCE DREDGING OF THE MURRELLS INLET FEDERAL NAVIGATION CHANNEL

GEORGETOWN, SOUTH CAROLINA

November 2022

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Charleston District (Corps) has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, to assess the potential environmental effects of conducting maintenance dredging of Murrells Inlet Federal navigation channel (Murrells Inlet) in Georgetown County, South Carolina. The dredged sediments will be placed on the Garden City Beach and Huntington Island State Park. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) summarizes the results of the USACE evaluation and documents the USACE's conclusions.

The proposed maintenance dredging project will remove material from the Federal navigation channel. A total of 500,000 to 750,000 cubic yards is expected to be dredged. Maintenance dredging will be by means of a hydraulic cutterhead dredge that will transport the sand through a pipeline to be discharged as a slurry and placed directly on the front beach of Garden City Beach and on both the front beach and at the terminal west end of the south jetty of Huntington Island State Park.

The No Action Alternative is the same as the most probable future condition without the proposed project. A basic alternative to any proposed plan of improvement is the "No Action" alternative. Adoption of this alternative implies acceptance of the existing conditions in the proposed project area.

Alternative measures for dredged material disposal were evaluated based on compliance with environmental laws and regulations, compliance with executive orders, level of environmental impacts including impacts to climate, land use, water resources and aquatic habitat, terrestrial resources and wildlife, air quality and noise, cultural resources, endangered species, hazardous toxic and radioactive waste, and socioeconomics, cost effectiveness, engineering feasibility, compliance with the Federal standard, and the ability of the Alternative to meet the project purpose and need. The Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative are the only Alternatives

that were evaluated in detail in the draft EA. For all alternatives, the potential effects were evaluated, as appropriate.

SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL EFFECTS:

A summary assessment of the potential effects of the proposed plan is listed and described below.

Table 1. Summary of Potential Effects of the Proposed Action

| | Insignificant effects | Insignificant effects as a result of mitigation* | Unaffected by action |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Aesthetics | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Air quality | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Aquatic resources/wetlands | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Invasive species | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Fish and wildlife habitat | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Threatened/Endangered species/critical habitat | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Historic properties | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other cultural resources | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Floodplains | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Hazardous, toxic & radioactive waste | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Hydrology | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Navigation | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Noise levels | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Socioeconomics | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Environmental justice | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Tribal trust resources | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Water quality | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Climate change | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>*Insignificant effects as a result of mitigation: For any resources that fall in this category, a description of the required mitigation is included in the paragraphs following this table</i> | | | |

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

The Corps proposes measures as part of the proposed maintenance activities to avoid and minimize impacts to threatened and endangered species listed under the 1973 Endangered Species Act (ESA), as amended. Section 3.5 of the EA describes the ESA-listed species that may occur in the study area. Effects evaluated in Section 4.5. Avoidance and minimization measures which have been identified, include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The standard manatee conditions will be implemented from 15 April to 31 October. 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.
- Daily nesting surveys will be conducted starting either May 1 or 65 days prior to the start of construction, whichever is later. These surveys will be performed between sunrise and 9:00 A.M. and will continue until the end of the project, or September 30, whichever is earlier. Any nests found in the area that will be impacted by construction activities will be moved to a safe location. The nesting surveys and nest relocations will only be performed by people with a valid South Carolina DNR permit.
- The dredging contractor will provide nighttime monitoring along the beach where construction is taking place to ensure the safety of female turtles attempting to nest. If a sea turtle is sighted on an area of beach scheduled for fill, construction activities will cease until the turtle returns to the ocean. A buffer zone around the female will be imposed in the event of an attempt to nest.
- If construction activities occur during the period May 1 through October 31, use of heavy equipment will be limited to the area undergoing placement of material.
- Staging areas for equipment and supplies will be located off of the beach to the maximum extent possible.
- During construction of this project, staging areas for construction equipment will be located off the beach to the maximum extent practicable. Nighttime storage of construction equipment not in use shall be off the beach to minimize disturbance to sea turtle nesting and hatching activities. In addition, all dredge pipes that are placed on the beach will be located as far landward as possible without compromising the integrity of the existing or reconstructed dune system. Temporary storage of pipes will be off the beach to the maximum extent possible. Temporary storage of pipes on the beach will be in such a manner so as to impact the least amount of nesting habitat and will likewise not compromise the integrity of the dune systems (placement of pipes perpendicular to the shoreline will be recommended as the method of storage).
- During construction of this project, all on-beach lighting associated with the project will be limited to the immediate area of active construction only. Such lighting will be shielded, low-pressure sodium vapor lights to minimize illumination of the nesting beach and nearshore waters. Red filters will be placed over vehicle headlights (i.e., bulldozers, front end loaders). Lighting on offshore equipment will be similarly minimized through

reduction, shielding, lowering, and appropriate placement of lights to avoid excessive illumination of the water, while meeting all U.S. Coast Guard and OSHA requirements. Shielded, low pressure sodium vapor lights will be highly recommended for lights on any offshore equipment that cannot be eliminated.

- The dredging contractor will use predator proof trash receptacles to minimize the presence of species that prey upon hatchlings.
- Immediately after completion of the project, USACE will perform tilling on the project's front beach area of Garden City Beach to a depth of at least 24 inches in order to reduce compaction associated with the newly placed sand.
- Visual surveys for escarpments along the project area will be made immediately after completing of the project and prior to May 1st for three subsequent years, if needed.
- Adherence to the appropriate Project Design Criteria identified in the 2020 South Atlantic Regional Biological Opinion.
- Sand placement activities at the beach will be monitored daily during the nesting season to protect nesting migratory birds. If nesting activities occur within the construction area, appropriate buffers will be placed around nests to ensure their protection.

Mitigation for resources covered by section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) as amended, that includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- A 50-foot buffer will be implemented to avoid impacts to a magnetic anomaly and potential shipwreck located in close proximity to the channel that was identified in a cultural resources survey.

The draft Supplemental EA and FONSI has been distributed for a 30-day comment and review period. The final Supplemental 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 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 _____

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