



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
GALVESTON DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS
P. O. BOX 1229
GALVESTON, TEXAS 77553-1229

December 2, 2013

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Department of the Army; Corps of Engineers

Notice of Availability for the Environmental Assessment, Draft Integrated Feasibility Report, Brazos Island Harbor Channel Improvement Project, Cameron County, Texas

AGENCY: Department of the Army, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Department of Defense; Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

ACTION: Notice of Availability and Joint Public Notice

SUMMARY: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Galveston District announces the release of the Draft Integrated Feasibility Report and Environmental Assessment (DIFR-EA), and their public comment periods, for the Brazos Island Harbor Channel Improvement Project, Cameron County, Texas. The non-Federal sponsor for the proposed project is the Brownsville Navigation District.

PURPOSE: This public notice is to inform interested parties that the USACE, Galveston District (the District) has prepared a Draft EA in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Public Law 91-190, and regulations for implementing the Procedural Provisions of the NEPA, 40 Code of Federal Regulations 1500-1508. This notice is being distributed to interested State, Federal, and local agencies, private organizations, and individuals in order to assist in collecting facts and recommendations concerning the Tentatively Selected Plan (TSP) of channel improvements to deepen the existing authorized 42-foot mean lower low water (MLLW) channel to 52 feet MLLW and extend the offshore portion of the channel 4,000 feet (0.8 mile) farther into the Gulf of Mexico.

COMMENT PERIOD: The USACE, Galveston District will be accepting written public comments on the DIFR-EA from December 6, 2013 through January 7, 2014. Comments on the DIFR-EA must be postmarked by January 7, 2014.

SUBMISSION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS: Persons desiring to express their views or provide information to be considered in evaluating the impact of this work and the future maintenance operations are requested to mail their comments to:

District Engineer
U.S. Army Engineer District, Galveston
ATTN: CESWG-PE-PR
P.O. Box 1229
Galveston, Texas 77553-1229

PROJECT LOCATION: The Brazos Island Harbor (BIH) project is located on the Gulf of Mexico coast about 3 miles north of the United States-Mexico border and east of the City of Brownsville, in Cameron County, Texas. The existing BIH project includes the Entrance and Jetty Channels which extend about 2.4 miles into the Gulf of Mexico, and the Main Channel which terminates at the Port of Brownsville Turning Basin about 17 miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Channel deepening would improve the navigation efficiency of deep draft vessels and offshore oil rigs using the channel to access the Port of Brownsville. The 52 by 250-foot TSP would extend the Entrance Channel 4,000 feet farther into the Gulf of Mexico to reach the natural Gulf depth corresponding to the deepening project. The Entrance and Jetty Channels from Stations -17+000 to 0+000 would be deepened to 54 feet MLLW. This depth includes an additional two feet to accommodate for the effects of offshore waves on ship movements. From Station 0+000 to 84+200, the Main Channel would be deepened to a depth of 52 feet MLLW. From Station 84+200 to 86+000, the existing channel is 42 feet deep and no deepening is proposed. The channel would be maintained at the existing depth of 36 feet MLLW from Station 86+000 to the end of the Turning Basin at 89+500, as ships will have been light-loaded or unloaded before entering. No channel widening is proposed and channel side slopes would remain the same as the existing project. The actual dredging depth would be up to 4 feet deeper in the Entrance and Jetty Channels due to 2 feet of advance maintenance (AM) and 2 feet of allowable overdepth (AO), and up to 3 feet deeper in the Main Channel due to 2 feet of AM and 1 foot of AO. No improvements are proposed for the existing jetties. If the project is authorized, it is estimated that the 29-month long construction period could be finished and the project completed by 2021.

The TSP would generate approximately 14.1 million cubic yards (MCY) of new work material from initial construction and approximately 61.7 MCY of maintenance material over the 50-year period of analysis. Maintenance dredging quantities would increase approximately 14.1 percent over the existing project. New work and maintenance material would be distributed among the existing New Work Ocean Dredged Material Disposal Site (ODMDS), a nearshore Feeder Berm and existing upland, confined placement areas (PAs) 2, 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B, 7 and 8. The new work material would consist primarily of clay with minor amounts of sand, silty sand and clayey sand, and maintenance material would consist of silt and clay sediments from the Main Channel and primarily sandy sediment from the Entrance/Jetty Channels and the first 11,000 feet of the Main Channel. Maintenance material from the Entrance and Jetty Channels may be placed in the Maintenance ODMDS if the nearshore Feeder Berm is unavailable.

None of the existing ODMDS and upland PAs would need to be expanded and no new ODMDS or upland PAs would be needed. Construction to raise upland PA containment dikes to heights needed to accommodate new work and maintenance quantities would be done within the footprints of the existing PAs. New work sediments would be stockpiled within the PAs and later used to raise PA dikes incrementally as needed to contain maintenance material for the 50-year period of analysis. Final elevations of the PA dikes would range from a total elevation of 17 feet NAVD 88 around PA 5A to a total elevation of 38 feet around PA 7. Armoring of the exterior toe of the PA 4A and 4B dikes on the side facing the channel would be implemented to prevent erosion from Station 22+000 to 33+800. Maintenance material from the Entrance and Jetty Channels and the first 11,000 feet of the Main Channel would generally be placed in the

nearshore Feeder Berm. Sediment removed by maintenance dredging would therefore be regularly placed back into the littoral system, available for cross-shore and longshore sediment transport to the beaches of South Padre Island.

STATE WATER QUALITY CERTIFICATION: TCEQ water quality certification is required. The TCEQ is reviewing the proposed project under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act and in accordance with Title 31, Texas Administrative Code Section 279.1-13 to determine if the work would comply with State water quality standards. By virtue of an agreement between the USACE and TCEQ, this public notice is also issued for the purpose of advising all known interested persons that TCEQ's decision on water quality certification is pending. Any comments concerning this work may be submitted to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Attention: Water Quality Division, MC-150, P.O. Box 13087, Austin, Texas 78711-3087. The public comment period extends 30 days from the date of publication of this notice. A copy of the public notice with a description of work is made available for review in the TCEQ's Austin office.

The TCEQ may conduct a public meeting to consider all comments concerning water quality if requested in writing. A request for a public meeting must contain the following information: the name, mailing address, and telephone number of the person making the request; a brief description of the interest of the requester, or of persons represented by the requester; and a brief description of how the project would adversely affect such interest.

COMPLIANCE WITH OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS:

Endangered Species Act. Coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) regarding potential endangered species impacts has been concluded and conservation measures recommended by USFWS will be adopted to prevent potential impacts to threatened and endangered species that may occur in the study area. Consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is underway regarding potential adverse impacts from new work construction by hopper dredges to four species of threatened and endangered swimming sea turtles (green, Kemp's ridley, loggerhead and hawksbill). Reasonable and prudent measures, developed in consultation with the NMFS, will be adopted to reduce potential impacts to these species.

Essential Fish Habitat: This notice initiates Essential Fish Habitat consultation requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Our initial determination is that the proposed action will not have a substantial adverse impact on Essential Fish Habitat or federally-managed fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico. Our final determination relative to project impacts and the need for mitigation measures is subject to review by and coordination with the NMFS.

Texas Council on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) Water Quality Certification: The proposed dredged material placement plan will also be evaluated with regard to the requirements of Section 404(b)(1) of the Clean Water Act. Water quality certification has been requested from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ).

Air Quality: Cameron County is currently designated as in attainment or unclassifiable with National Ambient Air Quality Standards. New work and maintenance dredging would result in minor short-term effects and would not result in a significant effect on regional air quality.

Other Agency Coordination: USACE has evaluated the proposed TSP for consistency with the Texas coastal management program, and concluded that the TSP is fully consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the enforceable policies of the Texas program. No impacts to historic properties have been identified, and potential unanticipated impacts to historic properties during construction and operation will be addressed in accordance with the terms of the Historic Properties Programmatic Agreement. A determination of “no effect” is currently being coordinated with the State Historic Preservation Officer.

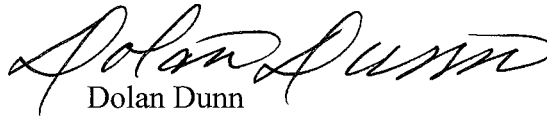
The following is a partial list of Federal, State, and local agencies with which these activities are being coordinated:

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 6
- U.S. Department of Commerce
- U.S. Department of the Interior
- Eighth Coast Guard District
- Budget and Planning Office, Office of the Governor of Texas
- Texas Historical Commission
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
- Texas General Land Office
- Texas Water Development Board
- Cameron County
- Port Isabel-San Benito Navigation District
- The City of Brownsville
- The City of Port Isabel

EVALUATION FACTORS: The decision whether to proceed with the proposed action will be based on an evaluation of the probable impact of the proposed activity on the public interest. That decision will reflect the national concern for both protection and utilization of important resources as well as public and environmental safety and economic concerns.

ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTATION: The work described in this notice represents a change to the existing project. A preliminary review of the TSP indicates that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required. This preliminary determination will be changed if information brought forth in the coordination process is of a significant nature. Based on this determination, a Draft EA has been prepared. The Draft EA assesses potential impacts to the human and natural environment that would result from the proposed project. The document is available online at <http://www.swg.usace.army.mil/BusinessWithUs/PlanningEnvironmentalBranch/DocumentsforPublicReview.aspx>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Questions about the proposed action and the DIFR-EA may be referred to Ms. Janelle Stokes at (409) 766-3039, or by email at janelle.s.stokes@usace.army.mil and Ms. Carolyn Murphy at (409) 766-3044, or by email at carolyn.e.murphy@usace.army.mil.



Dolan Dunn
Chief, Planning, Environmental
and Regulatory Division
Galveston District