



# NEWS RELEASE

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

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## Corps receives favorable Biological Opinion on Savannah harbor deepening

**SAVANNAH, Ga.** – The [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration \(NOAA\) Fisheries Service](#) has issued its final Biological Opinion on the effects of deepening the Savannah harbor on federally protected endangered species. The opinion concludes that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' plan to deepen the harbor is "not likely to jeopardize species" listed or proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, provided that specific conditions are met.

"We appreciate the time and resources that NOAA Fisheries Service has devoted to this very important opinion," said [Col. Jeff Hall](#), Commander of the [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District](#). "It supports the extensive research contained in our [Environmental Impact Statement](#) and confirms our findings that the project adequately mitigates for effects to protected species in the basin."

The Biological Opinion is part of the Corps' coordination with three other federal natural resource agencies that has been underway for 10 years. The Department of Commerce, the Department of the Interior, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army must all agree on any deepening and environmental mitigation plans for the harbor, according to the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 1999. (NOAA Marine Fisheries is part of the in the Commerce Department.) While the Biological Opinion marks a major milestone in the Corps' interagency coordination process, it does not serve as the Secretary of Commerce's final approval of the deepening project.

In an accompanying letter sent to the Corps Nov. 4, NOAA Fisheries Service states its Biological Opinion establishes "reasonable and prudent measures" along with conditions the Corps must fulfill as part of the environmental mitigation plan:

- 1) The finalization of an off-channel rock ramp fish passage design in coordination with NOAA Fisheries Service and the other federal and state resource agencies; and the construction of that fish passage at the New Savannah Bluff Lock and Dam (near Augusta, Ga.) to provide access to historical spawning habitat for sturgeon as a mitigation measure; and
- 2) Completion of the development and implementation of a comprehensive monitoring and adaptive management plan in coordination with NOAA Fisheries Service and the other federal and state resource agencies to help ensure the success of all mitigation measures, including the fish passage.

The Biological Opinion is available for public viewing on the Savannah District website at [http://www.sas.usace.army.mil/BIOp\\_4Nov2011.pdf](http://www.sas.usace.army.mil/BIOp_4Nov2011.pdf)

In November 2010, the Corps issued a [Draft General Re-evaluation Report](#) and [Environmental Impact Statement](#) on a proposal to deepen the Savannah Harbor from its current depth of 42 feet up to a maximum depth of 48 feet. The Corps plans to release a final report for public review in 2012, which will include additional information on the mitigation plan.

– 30 –

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' [Savannah District](#) manages [three lakes and hydroelectric dams](#) along the Savannah River. It also oversees a multi-billion dollar [military construction](#) program at 11 Army and Air Force installations in Georgia and North Carolina. Corps' projects range from barracks, hospitals and clinics to maintenance facilities, headquarters buildings and aircraft hangars. The Savannah District also has oversight and maintains additional civil works projects – from the Savannah and Brunswick harbors to the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway.