

# Viewpoint From Where I Sit

## SHEP impacts the District, Region, Nation

**T**he Savannah Harbor Expansion Project – SHEP – remains the district’s number one civil works priority because of the benefits to our nation.

After nearly 13 years of research, study, coordination, collaboration and refinement, we released the Final General Re-Evaluation Report and Final Environmental Impact Statement in April. In all its iterations, from the Tier One EIS 10 years ago, to the draft report in 2010 and the final report, one conclusion remained constant: deepening the Savannah harbor from its current depth of 42 feet to 47 feet proves to be the best alternative by enhancing the national economy while mitigating for impacts to the environment.

### **National and regional benefits**

A deeper harbor meets the growing demands of businesses and manufacturers who import and export goods around the world. We estimate the project’s annual net benefit to the nation is \$174 million. That comes from increased shipping efficiencies by using fewer, larger ships. USACE’s conservative formula estimates the initial investment for SHEP will create 11,000 jobs nationally, including more than 3,700 in the bi-state area and 2,400 locally.

### **Major changes**

SHEP underwent significant changes from the draft report in November 2010 to April 2012’s final report. We updated construction costs, environmental mitigation costs, and annual operations costs and compared them to the national economic benefits. We also considered public comments and requests from three federal cooperating agencies concerned with environmental protection. You’ll see details, but the change I want to emphasize is the increase in benefits compared to costs of SHEP. Today, we anticipate that every dollar the American public puts into the deepening will give back about \$5.50 – a great return on investment.



Col. Jeff Hall, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District, talks to media during a recent news conference announcing the release of the final report on the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project. *Photo by George Jumara.*

### **Protecting the environment**

Ensuring that SHEP has no impacts to Savannah’s water supply remains a high priority. So, the final plans include design of a new freshwater impoundment near the city’s water intake on Abercorn Creek.

We also improved on the design of a fish passage around the New Savannah Bluff Lock and Dam. It opens fish habitat closed since 1937. We’ll acquire and transfer freshwater wetlands to the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge, mitigate for impacts on coastal marshlands, and maintain the dissolved oxygen levels in the harbor by using Speece Cones to inject oxygen into the water as needed during the summer months.

### **Good for the District**

Months of work remains for the district before the Army issues its Record of Decision. If approved and funded, SHEP designs will continue, followed by 48 to 60 months of construction and 10 years of environmental monitoring. Once complete, many team members will reflect back on SHEP. You should do so with well-deserved pride, knowing you had a part in an accomplishment that benefits people all across the nation. 

*By Col. Jeff Hall, Commander, USACE Savannah District*