

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)
Noyes Cut Section 1135 Ecosystem Restoration Study
Satilla River Basin, Georgia

Camden County, Georgia

1. Description of Proposed Action: The Savannah District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District (CESAS), proposes to restore the natural hydrology within the Satilla River estuary. To achieve the project goals, the Tentatively Selected Plan (TSP) includes three closure structures that would be placed within Noyes Cut, Dynamite Cut, and Old River Run (ORR). These closures are designed to restore the hydrodynamic environment and restore salinity gradients, reduce local sedimentation issues, and increase connectivity for local biota by increasing tidal exchange in Dover and Umbrella Creeks. The three closure structures would require approximately 12,590 tons of rip rap and bedding stone for fill material.

2. Factors Considered in Determination: the Savannah District has assessed the impacts of the proposed action on important resources, including wetlands and aquatic resources/fisheries, terrestrial resources, wildlife, threatened, endangered and protected species, cultural resources, air quality, and water quality. No significant adverse impacts were identified for any of the important resources within the area of impact. This assessment concludes that this alternative (TSP), “may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect” manatees, Atlantic sturgeon, shortnose sturgeon, and wood stork or their critical habitat. The risk of encountering Hazardous, Toxic, Radioactive Waste (HTRW) is low and no impacts were identified that would require compensatory mitigation. The environmental impact analysis and numerous benefits to the environment are detailed in the Draft Integrated Feasibility Report and Environmental Assessment entitled “Noyes Cut Section 1135 Ecosystem Restoration Study Satilla River Basin, Georgia” herein incorporated by reference.

Prior to the finalizing this document, the District will address all comments provided by Federal and state agencies and the public. The District will also address (concur with, or resolve) all of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recommendations in their Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act Report (FWCAR).

3. Environmental Design Commitments. The following commitments are an integral part of the proposed action:

- If the proposed action is changed significantly or its construction is not started within one year, Savannah District will reassess potential impacts to Federally-listed threatened or endangered species, and their critical habitat to ensure no adverse impacts would occur.
- All action alternatives include post construction monitoring of the existing data points for 5 years to ensure the accuracy of the predicted hydrodynamic changes

from the Hydraulic and Hydrologic (H&H) modeling. The monitoring includes assessing changes in flow and salinity in accordance with the study objectives.

- Construction contractor specifications will include the standard construction limitations as provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to avoid impacts to listed species that may be in the area.
- Construction of all of the closures would utilize barges to avoid impacts to surrounding wetlands.
- A Memorandum of Agreement would be executed with the Georgia State Historic Preservation Office to mitigate any adverse effects to significant resources that would be impacted.

4. Public Involvement. The Integrated Feasibility Report and Environmental Assessment (including Appendices) will be available to the public for a 30 day review. Responses to comments from the public review will be included in an Appendix to the Final Report. The non-Federal sponsor, stakeholders; and the regulatory agencies that have been involved in the study including GADNR, USFWS, and NMFS will be consulted regarding the selection of the TSP. As of March 2017, most local residents and commercial fisherman (crabbing) have been supportive in general of alternatives involving closure of man-made cuts in the vicinity during recent inquiries by stakeholders.

5. Conclusion. Savannah District will assess the potential impacts of the proposed action. Based on this assessment, resolving comments from the resource agencies and the public, implementation of the environmental design commitments listed above, Savannah District may conclude that the proposed action would not result in a significant impact on the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement may not be prepared.

Draft

Date

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