



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, SAVANNAH DISTRICT
100 W. OGLETHORPE AVENUE
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA 31401-3604

Planning Branch

PUBLIC NOTICE
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

SUBJECT: Notice of Availability of a proposed update to the Master Plan (MP), Draft Environmental Assessment (EA), and Draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for Richard B. Russell Lake (RBR).

Notice of the following is hereby given:

a. Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, notice is hereby given that the Savannah District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) proposes to update the current MP and Draft EA for RBR.

b. Savannah District announces the availability to the public of a draft updated MP, Draft EA, and Draft FONSI for RBR. Downloaded document copies may be obtained from the District website at <http://www.sas.usace.army.mil/About/DivisionsandOffices/PlanningDivision/PlansandReports.aspx>. Copies may also be requested via email by contacting Ms. Cynthia Gose at the following email address: CESAS-PD@usace.army.mil, or via telephone at: (912) 652-6017.

c. Written statements regarding the Draft EA and FONSI for the proposed action will be accepted at the Savannah District Office until

12 O'CLOCK NOON, September 5, 2017

from all persons interested in the activity and whose interests may be affected by the proposed action.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The proposed action consists of updating the Master Plan (MP) for Russell Project. The USACE Engineering Regulation 1130-2-550 requires a MP for civil works projects and other fee-owned lands for which USACE has administrative responsibility to manage the natural, recreational and cultural resources throughout the life of the water resource project. The current MP is Design Memorandum #31, dated 1985. The changes proposed are the addition of cabins, a marina and hiking trails.

The proposed MP update meets the following goals:

1. Provide the best possible combination of responses to regional needs, resource capabilities and suitability, and expressed public interests and desires consistent with authorized project purposes;
2. Contribute towards providing a high degree of recreation diversity within the region;
3. Emphasize the particular qualities, characteristics, and potentials of the project; and
4. Exhibit consistency and compatibility with national objectives and other state and regional goals and programs.

Two possible alternative plans were developed as part of the planning process. The alternatives considered are as follows:

a. **Without Project Condition/No Action Alternative:** This No Action alternative involves the continued use of the Design Memorandum #31, dated 1985. This would not allow the Russell Project to operate under an up-to-date Master Plan, in accordance with ER 1130-2-550.

b. **Alternative 1 – Update Master Plan:** Under this alternative, the Master Plan (MP) would be updated, as required for civil works projects, and other fee-owned lands for which USACE has administrative responsibility for management of natural, recreational and cultural resources throughout the life of the water resource project. The impacts from the proposed changes to the MP are discussed in the Draft EA.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY EVALUATION:

Environmental Assessment: USACE Savannah District has prepared a Draft EA and found that an Environmental Impact Statement will not be required for this action. The Draft EA is being coordinated concurrently with this Notice to Federal and State natural resource agencies for review and comment.

Wetlands: The biological portion of the MP would result in no direct or indirect adverse impacts to wetlands. An additional marina would have no direct or indirect adverse impacts on wetlands, nor would additional trails or cabins. Any proposed pathway or dock would avoid any impacts to wetland resources. The outgrant holder would be required to use the regulatory process to obtain a Section 404 permit for any impacts to wetlands.

Threatened, Endangered and other Protected Species: Implementation of the updated MP is not likely to adversely affect any listed species, or their designated critical habitats within the project area.

Cultural Resources: With implementation of the proposed action, there would be no direct adverse impacts on any cultural resources. Management of cultural resources would continue in accordance with the Historic Properties Management Plan, dated January 1998. Development proposed within Russell State Park would be located in areas that have been previously classified for High Density Recreation. A cultural resources assessment would need to be performed prior to siting and constructing new facilities.

Efforts would be taken to place the facilities in areas that do not contain historic properties. Coordination with Georgia Historic Preservation Division would be required to comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. In the event the facilities could not be sited to avoid significant resources, an agreement document would be prepared and executed to mitigate any adverse effects.

Minor indirect adverse impacts could occur due to increased visitor use of Russell State Park. Historic sites that contain exposed features such as scattered bricks or chimney falls, when lying exposed on the ground surface, could be easily impacted by activities, including artifact collection and trampling. Unauthorized use, including creation of user defined roads, trails, and campsites, causes an effect by opening new areas to use and shifting recreation into sensitive areas, leading to effects on nearby cultural resources..

Terrestrial Resources: With implementation of the proposed action, a marina, trails and cabins may be added to the Russell Project. The cabins would be constructed in an area that is zoned for recreational activity. The trails would minimize adverse impacts to the surroundings as much as possible. The marina would need to comply with all applicable requirements.

Essential Fish Habitat: Savannah District determined that the project area is outside the coastal zone and there would be no direct or indirect effects on Essential Fish Habitat (EFH).

Water Quality Certification: Section 401 Water Quality Certifications from the States of Georgia and South Carolina are not needed for the proposed action. Impacts to water quality would be negligible for either the Proposed Plan or the No Action alternative.

Coastal Zone Consistency: Savannah District determined that the project area is outside the coastal zone and there would be no direct or indirect effects on the coastal zone, therefore, the EA includes a Negative Determination under the Coastal Zone Management Act.

Clean Air Act: With implementation of the MP, The Proposed Plan and the No Action alternative would result in no adverse impacts to air quality.

Application of the Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines: No dredging or sediment disposal activities are included in the proposed plan. Therefore, a Section 404(b)(1) evaluation is not required.

Public Interest Review: The decision whether to proceed with the project as proposed will be based on an evaluation of the probable impact, including cumulative impacts, of the proposed activity on the public interest. That decision will reflect the national concern for both the protection and use of important resources. The benefits which reasonably may be expected to accrue from the proposal will be balanced against its reasonably foreseeable detriments. All factors that may be relevant to the proposal will be considered. Among these are conservation, economics, aesthetics, general environmental concerns, wetlands, historic properties, fish and wildlife, land use, recreation, water supply and conservation, water quality, energy needs, safety, consideration of property ownership, environmental justice, and, in general, the needs and welfare of the people.

Consideration of Public Comments: USACE is soliciting comments from the public; Federal, State, and local agencies and officials; Native American Tribes; and other interested parties in order to consider and evaluate the impacts of the proposed activity. Any comments received will be considered by the USACE in its deliberations on this action. To make this decision, comments are used to assess impacts to endangered species, wetlands, historic properties, water quality, general environmental effects, and the other public interest factors listed above. Comments are used in the preparation of the Final EA and FONSI pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. Comments are also used to determine the need for a public hearing and to determine the overall public interest of the proposed activity.

Comment Period: Anyone wishing to comment to the Corps on this proposed action should submit comments no later than the end of the comment period shown in this notice, in writing, to the Savannah District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Planning Division, ATTN: Mrs. Cynthia Gose (PD), 100 West Oglethorpe Avenue, Savannah, Georgia 31401-3640, by FAX to 912-652-5787, or by e-mailing the comments to the following address: CESAS-PD@usace.army.mil.


William G. Bailey *for*
Chief, Planning Branch