



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

May 23, 2017

JOINT PUBLIC NOTICE
Savannah District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers,
and
South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control
and
Georgia Department of Natural Resources

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

SUBJECT: Notice of Availability of a Draft Supplemental Environmental Assessment (SEA), and Draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) to evaluate proposed changes to the McCoys Cut flow re-routing feature of the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project (SHEP). This SEA supplements the July 2012 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project (SHEP).

Notice of the following is hereby given:

1. 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 modify what is described in the FEIS. The changes fall into three categories: (1) dredging an additional 2,600 feet of dredging within Middle River (stations 58+00 to 84+00) to -7 feet mean lower low water (MLLW) to provide the designed flows. An additional four feet of dredging depth is also proposed at the mouth of Union Creek within the previous-approved footprint to account for potential future shoaling, (2) using the majority of excavated sediments beneficially to create wetlands in both McCoombs (western arm of McCoys Cut) and Rifle Cuts to enhance fish and wildlife habitat, and (3) taking the remaining balance of approximately 100,000 cubic yards of course sand from the upper reaches of Middle and Little Back River to either the Sediment Basin or to the approved upland Dredged Material Containment Areas (DMCA).

2. Savannah District announces the availability to the public of a Draft SEA and Draft FONSI concerning the modifications to the McCoys Cut flow re-routing feature as part of SHEP in a manner that allows the project to function as intended and to beneficially use the excavated materials to create approximately nine acres of intertidal wetlands. Copies of the documents can be downloaded from the District website at <http://www.sas.usace.army.mil/About/DivisionsandOffices/PlanningDivision/PlansandReports.aspx>. Copies may also be obtained through email request to the following

address: CESAS-PD@usace.army.mil, or by contacting Mr. Nathan Dayan at (912) 652-5172.

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

12 O’CLOCK NOON, June 26, 2017

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

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION: The purpose of the proposed action is to modify the previously-approved SHEP Mitigation Flow Re-routing Plan to provide the designed flows in Middle River described in the 2012 FEIS, and to beneficially use the dredged sediments to create approximately nine acres of intertidal wetlands rather than placing it all at the approved upland DMCA’s. The remaining balance of dredged sediment will be placed either in existing upland DMCA’s or in a portion of the Sediment Basin, which is another flow re-routing feature of SHEP.

There is no change in the method or timing of dredging, the design of the diversion structure or the rock plugs. Construction will still take place from barges to minimize impacts to adjacent lands.

The proposed action consists of dredging an additional 2,600 feet within Middle River (station 58+00 to 84+00) to -7 feet mean lower low water (MLLW) to provide the designed flows. Figure 1 shows the location of the additional dredging reach in Middle River. Figure 2 shows the additional dredging reach along with locations of the proposed beneficial use placement sites. The green, orange, and blue colors shown on Figure 1 indicate areas covered by the FEIS (approximately 3.1 miles of dredging and 315,000 cubic yards of dredged material). The area in white shown on Figure 1 indicates the new work being proposed (approximately 2,600 feet of additional dredging, about 24,000 cubic yards). In addition, dredging an additional 4 feet at the mouth of Union Creek (also shown on Figure 1 and 2) is proposed to account for potential future shoaling. This additional depth remains within the same footprint, but would be four feet deeper for a distance of approximately 1,360 feet.

A large portion of the sediment removed as part of the project would be used beneficially to create wetlands in McCoombs (western arm of McCoys Cut) and Rifle Cuts (Figures 2), rather than place all of the material in the existing DMCA’s as described in the FEIS. Approximately nine acres of wetlands would be created using the dredged sediments from the project. The material dredged from the Middle and Little Back Rivers would be placed behind the cut closure structures to an elevation

suitable for wetland creation. These new deposition sites are within the boundary of the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge. The quantity of material to be dredged is enough to fill the two cuts to elevation +8 to +8.5 feet MLLW. Once the excavated sediments have been placed in the cuts, the eastern ends of both cuts will be armored with rock to approximately elevation +5 feet MLLW. Above this elevation, protection against erosion will be provided by the placement of hay bales secured with live stakes and several rows of container plantings. This will reduce the risk of erosion until vegetation establishes naturally along most of the length of the fill area. Potential plant species that will be planted on the edge of the newly created wetlands include; River oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*), Slender spikegrass (*Chasmanthium laxum*), Cane (*Arundinaria gigantea*), Yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*), Alder (*Alnus serrulata*), buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), Virginia willow (*Itea virginica*), Sweet pepperbush (*Clethra alnifolia*). The rest of the created wetland habitat will mature and fill in by the second full growing season.

The remaining balance of dredged sediment will be placed either in existing upland DMCA or in a portion of the Sediment Basin, which is another flow re-routing feature of SHEP.

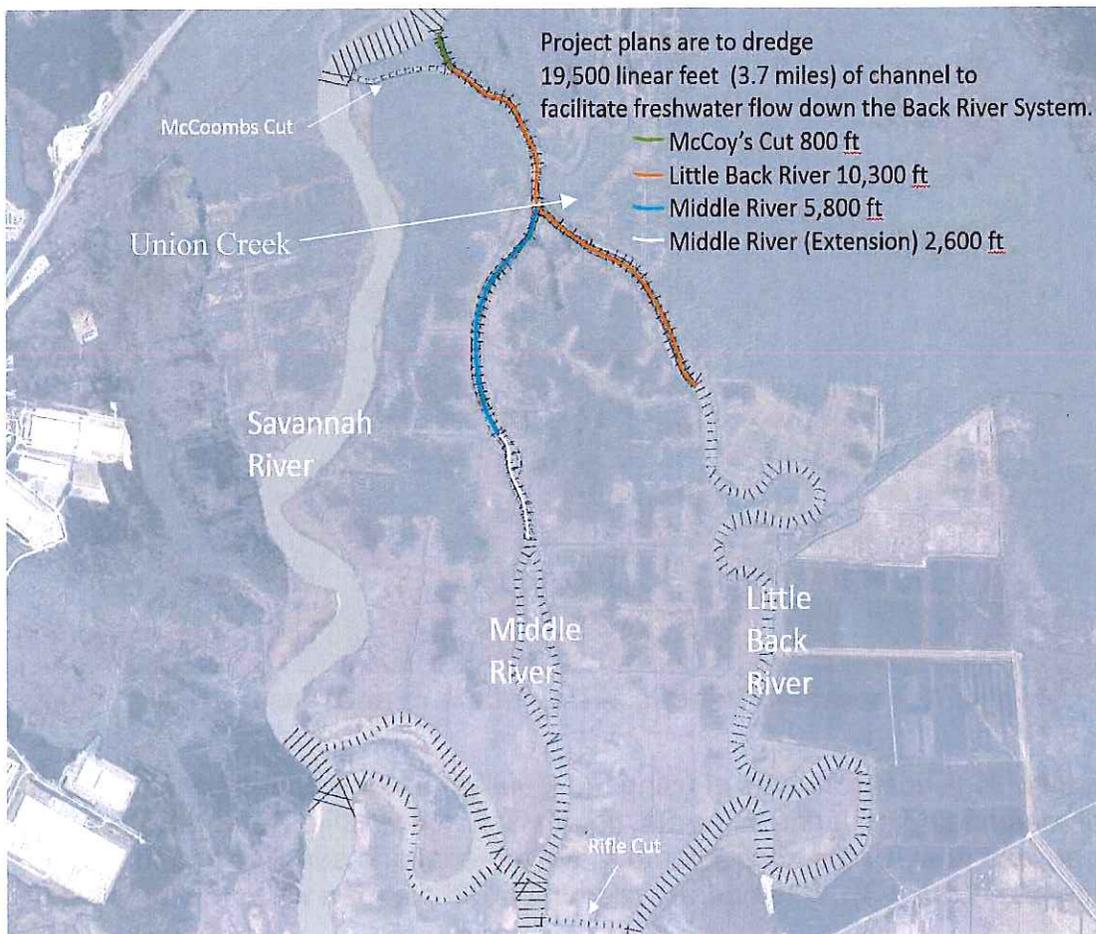


Figure 1: Location of Additional Dredging in Middle River



Figure 2: Proposed Beneficial Use Placement Areas

As a result of logistical concerns of using the Houlihan Bridge during construction, an area will be designated on lands in the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge for possible use as an access area for the contractor to move material and supplies to and from the construction site (Figure 3). A temporary pile supported platform would be installed on

the edge of the existing tidal wetland and the Back River, impacting approximately 0.13 acres of tidal wetlands and 0.10 acres of river. Dike improvements would also be performed leading to the new access site platform, impacting approximately 0.23 acres of managed wetlands inside the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) diked system. This platform is expected to be in place for the duration of the construction timeframe which is estimated to be approximately one year.

If the Houlihan Bridge is to be used to transport materials and supplies to and from the construction site, additional Georgia Department of Transportation (GA DOT) staff may be needed to operate the bridge. In addition, if the contractor wants to use the bridge during nighttime hours, they will required to provide the necessary lighting to safely operate at night.

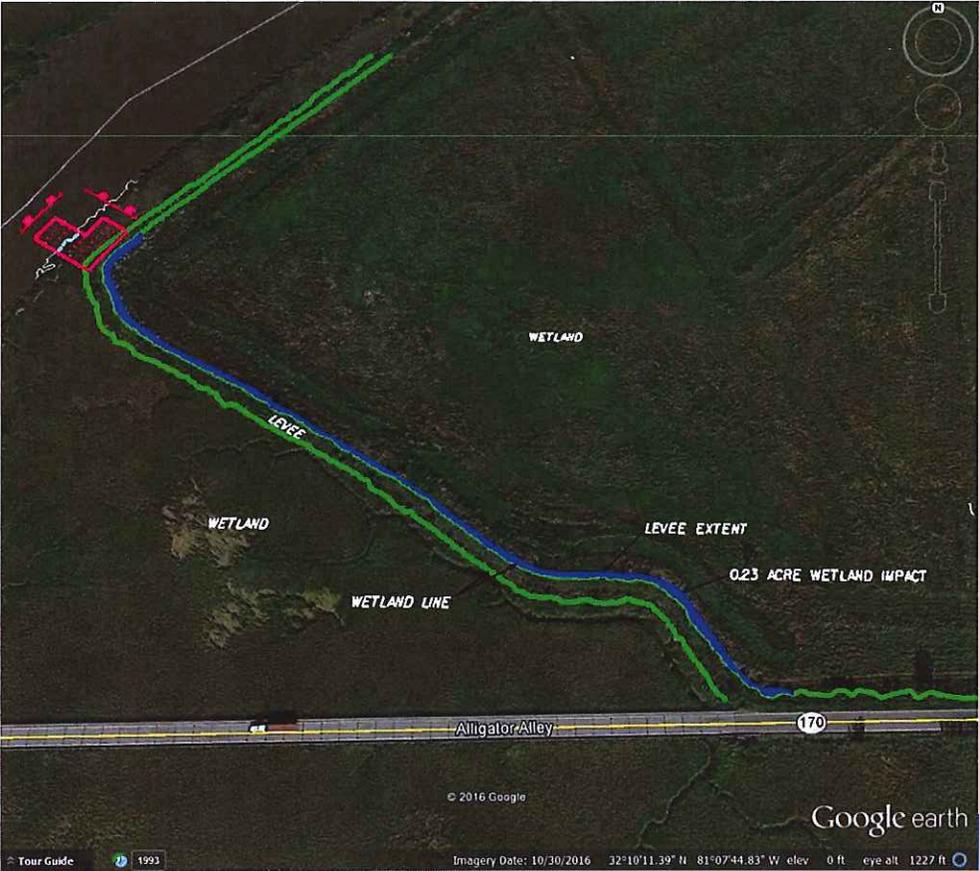


Figure 3: Approximate location of access site within Savannah National Wildlife Refuge

Alternative plans were developed as part of the planning process. The alternatives that were considered were as follows:

Initial Array of Alternatives			
Alternative	Includes	Carry Forward	Rationale
No Action Alternative (NAA) 1	No Change in dredging or sediment placement	Yes	NEPA requires NAA to be carried forward.
2	Extend dredging 2,600 feet, partial beneficial reuse of excavated sediments at McCoombs Cut and Rifle Cut, rest in approved DMCAS. An area will be designated on USFWS lands on the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge as a possible access area for the contractor to haul material and supplies to and from the construction site.	Yes	Use the dredged material beneficially to reduce the amount of dredged material placed in the approved DMCAs. This would maintain capacity for O&M and new work sediments and provide ecosystem benefits by creating wetlands.
3	Extend dredging 2,600 feet, beneficial reuse of excavated sediments at McCoombs Cut and Rifle Cut, maximum amount in both and remainder going to the Sediment Basin. Same access as Alternative 1.	Yes	Take excess dredged material to the Sediment Basin rather than the approved DMCA 2A site. This would save the project money and help to achieve the required fill depth in the Sediment Basin, thereby acting as a salinity block.
	Extend dredging 2,600 feet, beneficial reuse of excavated sediments at McCoombs Cut and Rifle Cut, maximum amount in both with the remainder of the sediment placed either in approved DMCAs or in the Sediment Basin. Same access as Alternative 1.	Yes	Potentially reduce costs by allowing the contractor flexibility to place the remaining balance of dredged material at either the approved DMCA site or within the Sediment Basin

4	Extend dredging 2,600 feet, partial beneficial reuse of excavated sediments at McCoombs Cut site only, rest in DMCA's. Same access as Alternative 1.	No	Using only one site for beneficial use would not achieve as many environmental benefits since it produces less wetlands. The additional sediments going to the DMCA's would take up much needed capacity for O&M and new work sediments.
5	Extend dredging 2,600 feet, no change in sediment placement, all excavated sediments to go to approved DMCA's. Same access as Alternative 1.	No	The cost to transport the dredged material from the project area to the approved disposal areas would have the highest cost and would take up needed O&M capacity at the DMCA's.
6	Extend dredging 2,600 feet, beneficial reuse of excavated sediments at McCoombs Cut and Rifle Cut, maximum amount in both. Same access as Alternative 1.	No	Filling the cuts to a maximum elevation of 9 feet MLLW for wetland habitat would still leave a balance of material that will need to be placed in DMCA 2A as originally planned.
7	Extend dredging 2,600 feet, beneficial reuse of excavated sediments at McCoombs Cut and Rifle Cut, maximum amount in both, and remainder going to the New Cut Same access as Alternative 1.	No	It would be cost prohibitive to bring the excess dredged material to New Cut for beneficial reuse due to the large amount of rock needed to close New Cut for the limited amount of sediment that would be saved from going to the approved DMCA 2A site.
Placement of dredged material to create wetlands or to be placed in approved DMCA's could be accomplished either mechanically or hydraulically.			

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY EVALUATION:

Environmental Assessment: Savannah District has prepared a Draft Supplemental environmental assessment (SEA) 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 and public for review and comment.

Wetlands: With implementation of the proposed action, impacts to wetland habitat as a result of the project would be similar as those discussed in the 2012 FEIS. However, with implementation of the proposed alternative, there would be temporary adverse impacts to existing wetlands where the access area within the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge is proposed. As part of the proposed alternatives, sediments excavated for the project would be used to create approximately nine acres of wetland habitat where currently open water exists. The creation of additional wetlands in the project area will help offset the temporary wetland impacts within the temporary access area within the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge. They would also help improve water quality, provide food and habitat for various fish and wildlife species, and enhance aesthetics and recreation opportunities.

Threatened, Endangered and other Protected Species: With implementation of the proposed action, the impact to T&E Species (Atlantic and shortnose sturgeon) would be the similar to those described for the plan selected in the FEIS. To reduce adverse effects to sturgeon during construction of the flow re-routing modifications and during the harbor deepening, special provisions would be implemented to protect sturgeon. This updated assessment concludes that this alternative as currently proposed, "may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect" Atlantic and shortnose sturgeon, or their critical habitat.

Cultural Resources: With implementation of the proposed action, the impact to cultural resources would similar as those described in the FEIS. The construction of plugs in McCoombs Cut and Rifle Cut and the placement of excavated sediment adjacent to those plugs to create wetlands would not impact any cultural resources. Several cultural resources sites associated with maritime history are located along the shoreline within the Sediment Basin. Those sites are outside the limits where dredged material would be placed.

Essential Fish Habitat: With implementation of the proposed action, the impact to EFH would be similar as those described originally for the plan selected in the FEIS. Based on the salinity and sediment preferences for the brown, white, and pink shrimp and the existing conditions of the project area, USACE believes the project will not likely affect these EFH species by the additional dredging and sediment placement activities to create wetlands. However, the Sediment Basin has higher salinity levels and is

comprised of mostly silty materials. As a result, during sediment placement at the Sediment Basin, there is a possibility that the three species of shrimp could be present.

Water Quality Certification: Updated Section 401 Water Quality Certifications from the States of Georgia and South Carolina are being requested for the proposed action. Additional fill would be placed in the waters of the U.S. as well as additional dredging will be performed. The quality of the water discharged from a DMCA would not change.

Coastal Zone Consistency: Updated Coastal Zone Consistency concurrences from the States of Georgia and South Carolina are being requested for the proposed action. Additional fill would be placed in the waters of the U.S. at McCoombs and Rifle Cut, as well as possibly the Sediment Basin. Additional dredging is needed to provide the flows designed in the 2012 FEIS. The site of the proposed action is within the coastal zone but only has minor additional temporary direct and indirect impacts on the coastal zone that were described in the SHEP FEIS. We do not expect additional negative impacts to coastal resources from this project. Therefore, we believe this project is fully consistent with the enforceable policies of the Georgia and South Carolina Coastal Zone Management (CZM) programs.

Clean Air Act: With implementation of the proposed action, impacts to air quality would be similar to those described in the FEIS and still be within the de minimis level (minimal threshold for which a conformity determination must be performed for various pollutants in a project area). In addition, this alternative would not increase greenhouse gases.

Application of the Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines: As part of the implementation for the proposed action, additional fill would be placed in the waters of the U.S and therefore, an updated Section 404(b)(1) evaluation has been completed.

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 South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control on effects of the proposed modification on the South Carolina Water Quality Certification should submit comments no later than the end of the comment period shown in this notice, in writing, to Ms. Heather Preston, Director, Division of Water Quality, South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control 2600 Bull Street Columbia, South Carolina 29201-1708.

Comment Period: Anyone wishing to comment to the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control on effects of the proposed modification on the South Carolina Coastal Zone Management Program should submit comments no later than the end of the comment period shown in this notice, in writing, to Mr. Curtis Joyner Manager, Coastal Zone Consistency Certification Section, South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control 1362 McMillan Ave., Suite 400 Charleston, South Carolina 29405.

Comment Period: Anyone wishing to comment to the Georgia Department of Health and Environmental Control on effects of the proposed modification on the Georgia Water Quality Certification should submit comments no later than the end of the comment period shown in this notice, in writing, to Mr. Bradley Smith GA EPD - Wetlands Unit Watershed Protection Branch, Coastal District Office, 400 Commerce Center Drive Brunswick, Georgia 31523.

Comment Period: Anyone wishing to comment to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources on effects of the proposed modification on the Georgia Coastal Zone Management Program should submit comments no later than the end of the comment period shown in this notice, in writing, to Ms. Kelie Moore, Federal Consistency Coordinator, Coastal Resources Division, One Conservation Way, Brunswick, Georgia 31520.

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: Mr. Nathan Dayan (PD), 100 West Oglethorpe Avenue, Savannah, Georgia 31401-3640, by FAX to 912-652-5787, or by emailing the comments to the following address: CESAS-PD@usace.army.mil.



William G. Bailey
Chief, Planning Branch

