October 15, 2020

Regulatory Division
SAS-2019-00336

JOINT PUBLIC NOTICE
Savannah District/State of Georgia

The Savannah District has received an application for a Department of the Army permit, pursuant to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C § 1344), as follows:

Application Number: SAS-2019-00336

Applicant: Mr. Christopher Novack
Georgia Ports Authority (GPA)
Post Office Box 2406
Savannah, Georgia 31402

Agent: Mr. Brandon Wall
Sligh Environmental Consultants, Inc.
31 Park of Commerce Way, Suite 200B
Savannah, Georgia 31405

Location of Proposed Work: The project site is located in the Savannah River at GPA’s Garden City Terminal (GCT) Container Berth (CB) 1, in Savannah, Chatham County, Georgia (Latitude 32.1185 and Longitude -81.1324). The Savannah River is a Traditional Navigable Waterway (TNW).

Description of Work Subject to the Jurisdiction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: The applicant is proposing to modernize CB 1 at GCT in order to accommodate 14,000 twenty-foot equivalent unit (TEU) vessels. The project would realign the berth, provide structural upgrades, and increase the size of the ship-to-shore cranes. The project would also improve berthing capacity for the increasing number of larger New Panamax vessels. As proposed, the construction/realignment would occur in multiple stages. First, the berth would be realigned to match the existing orientation of the upstream CBs 2 and 3. This would put the berth further away from the federal Navigation Channel and would remove the obstacle for passing ships. It would also allow the entire length of the berth to be utilized. The realignment would be into the upland, so much of the land disturbance would be in upland and would require upland excavation for the new berth.
Secondly, the ship-to-shore cranes would be replaced with larger cranes capable of handling the largest vessels on the ocean routes today. Lastly, the berth would be deepened from -42 Mean Lower Low Water (MLLW) to -47' MLLW. The project depth of the berth would match the depth of the Federal Navigation Channel authorized in SHEP. Future annual maintenance dredging of 27,333 cubic yards is also proposed but this would be minimized through the installation and operation of four scour jets/silt suspension units mounted along the face of the new berth.

Specifically, the construction/realignment would occur as follows:

Stage I would include the installation of the new bulkhead wall landward of the existing bulkhead using landside equipment only. The new HZ combination wall would tie into the existing sheet pile wall under CB2 and would extend straight in line with that existing wall (into upland) whereas the existing CB 1 dock makes a turn to follow the river. The wall would extend approximately 550 feet and then make a 90 degree turn towards the river where it would fall in line with the new waterside crane beam and extend the rest of the length of the dock. The old (existing) wall would remain in place during this stage of construction, and upland excavation would commence between the existing and new bulkheads. The existing bulkhead would serve to retain the upland while it is being excavated in order to minimize any chances of erosion and sedimentation into the waterway. A total of 291,700 cubic yards of upland material would be removed. All work proposed for Stage I would occur in upland.

After the new bulkhead is installed and upland excavation has commenced, demolition of the existing CB 1 would take place using barge mounted equipment. A total of 3,440, 18" and 20" square and octagonal precast concrete piles would be removed from the waterway along with 1,670 linear feet of the existing (old) bulkhead. At this point, the new berth would be open to the waterway because the old sheet pile would be removed. A small section of the existing CB 1 wharf on the far downstream end would be left in place to help in mooring ships and to help retain the bank for when the new berth is excavated/dredged.

Stage 3 would begin with the creation of a 2:1 slope under the upstream end of CB 1. This would reduce the amount of material associated with the initial dredging requirement. This is proposed as clam shell removal. Creation of the slope would be followed by installation of the pile supported wharf. The majority of the wharf would be located over upland landward of the new bulkhead; however, the upstream portion would have to be constructed over the water that was created by the upland excavation activities. Pile driving in this "new" waterway area would consist of 180, 24" precast concrete piles and 420 - 20" square concrete piles. These piles would be driven into the marl using impact hammers.

Stage 4 consists of deepening the berth from -42' MLLW to -47' MLLW (plus 2' overdredge and 2' of advanced maintenance dredge). Dredging would occur within the man-made (upland excavated) area once landside excavation is no longer possible and the outside (old) wall has been removed. Dredging would also occur within the existing
waterway primarily along the slope landward of the existing berth line. This area is currently covered with the existing dock and over 3,400 concrete piles. Beyond the slope, the existing 42' deep berth would be deepened to -47 feet to match the depth of the post-SHEP federal channel. All dredging would be performed by a hydraulic cutterhead and/or clamshell and as proposed, would be disposed of in Dredged Material Containment Area 12A or 12B.

Nearly half of the area proposed for dredging consists of area covered by the existing CB 1 wharf. The remainder is within the deep open water habitat. The total volume for dredging within existing jurisdiction is 148,100 cubic yards (including 50,000 cubic yards of overdredge and advanced maintenance) and would occur over a 7.8 acre area. Prior to the completion of dredging the downstream end of CB 1, a steel sheet pile toe-wall would be installed perpendicular to the bank on the upriver side of the remaining (old) section of CB 1 to stabilize the slope downstream of the project site. The wall would be installed by impact driving the H-piles and vibrating the intermediate sheet pile.

The fifth and final stage of construction is to install the fender and bollard beam along the riverside of the Pipe-Z bulkhead wall. The beam would be supported by 44, 24" square precast concrete piles. Silt suspension systems would also be installed at 200' intervals along the front face of the berth to minimize silting in of the berth and future maintenance dredge requirements.

The proposed project would only dredge open water habitat and fully covered intertidal area. No impacts to special aquatic sites are proposed. Therefore, the applicant has proposed no compensatory mitigation.

BACKGROUND

The GCT is GPA's dedicated container port. Container Berth 1 is the downstream-most of the terminal's nine berths. The remainder of the developed facility consists of large container storage yards, rail and truck facilities, and various offices, support services, and other infrastructure necessary for operation of the terminal. The berth itself consists of deep open water habitat that is maintained at a depth of -42' MLLW. The dock consists of a pile-supported concrete platform structure with appropriate fenders, mooring hardware, etc. Landward of the dock is developed and paved container yards, roads, and other terminal facilities.

The applicant sampled and tested the sediments to be dredged from the project area in accordance with Savannah District protocols. The applicant's agent, Terracon, has submitted a report entitled “Tier II Sediment and Analysis Report, Container Berth 1 (CB1) Realignment, Georgia Ports Authority-Garden City Terminal,” stating “Based on the size of the disposal facility, available capacity and retention time within the facility, the lack of notable contamination within the sediments to be dredged, and the lack of supernatant expected to actually discharge from the dredge disposal facility, Terracon concludes that the minor ISWQS exceedances in the elutriate samples do not warrant
performing a numerical mixing model, nor environmental remediation for the sediment on-site. Terracon does not consider the proposed dredge material to be a possible carrier of contaminants that would lead to the dredge discharge contributing to the degradation of water quality within the receiving water.”

Currently, GPA has DA authorization to maintain the berth at -42’ MLLW via annual maintenance dredging of approximately 17,000 CYs of accumulated sediment.

This Joint Public Notice announces a request for authorizations from both the Corps and the State of Georgia. The applicant’s proposed work may also require local governmental approval.

STATE OF GEORGIA

Water Quality Certification: The Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Environmental Protection Division will review the proposed project for water quality certification, in accordance with the provisions of Section 401 of the Clean Water Act. Prior to issuance of a Department of the Army permit for a project location in, on, or adjacent to the waters of the State of Georgia, review for Water Quality Certification is required. A reasonable period of time, which shall not exceed one year, is established under the Clean Water Act for the State to act on a request for Water Quality Certification, after which, issuance of such a Department of the Army permit may proceed.

State-owned Property and Resources: The applicant may also require assent from the State of Georgia, which may be in the form of a license, easement, lease, permit or other appropriate instrument.

Marshland Protection: This notice also serves as notification of a request to alter coastal marshlands (under the provision of the Coastal Marshlands Protection Act, Georgia Laws, 1970, p. 939 and as amended), if required. Comments concerning this action should be submitted to the Marsh and Shore Management Section, Coastal Resources Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, 1 Conservation Way, Brunswick, Georgia 31523-8600 (Telephone 912-264-7218).

Georgia Coastal Management Program: Prior to the Savannah District Corps of Engineers making a final permit decision on this application, the project must be certified by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Coastal Resources Division, to be consistent with applicable provisions of the State of Georgia Coastal Management Program (15 CFR 930). Anyone wishing to comment on Coastal Management Program certification of this project should submit comments in writing within 30 days of the date of this notice to the Federal Consistency Coordinator, Coastal Management Program, Coastal Resources Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, One Conservation Way, Brunswick, Georgia 31523-8600 (Telephone 912-264-7218).
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

The Savannah District must consider the purpose and the impacts of the applicant’s proposed work, prior to a decision on issuance of a Department of the Army permit.

Cultural Resources Assessment: The upland that would be impacted and excavated during construction has already been paved and developed. Therefore, the potential for archeological resources to be located landward of the wharf is minimal. In addition, the area within the berth and beneath the wharf has also been previously (and continuously) disturbed through deepening, annual maintenance dredging, pile driving, and wharf construction. Previous studies completed for the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project showed no objects within the proposed dredge area. An online database search of the National Register of Historic Places also concluded that there are no sites listed on the register within 3 miles of the project area, and a search of the Georgia's Natural, Archeological, and Historic Resources GIS database concluded that there are no historic resources located within or immediately adjacent to the project area.

Based upon the information that the applicant has provided, in addition to the background review, the nature, scope, and magnitude of the work, and/or structures to be permitted are such that there is little likelihood that a historic property exists or may be affected within the permit area. Therefore, the Corps has determined that this action has no potential to cause effects, and it has fulfilled it Section 106 responsibilities in accordance with 36 CFR 800.3(a)(1) and 33 CFR 325 Appendix C, paragraph 3.b.

Essential Fish Habitat (EFH): This notice initiates the EFH consultation requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The applicant’s proposal may result in the destruction or alteration of EFH utilized by various life stages of species comprising the red drum, shrimp, bluefish or snapper grouper management complexes. Our initial determination is that the proposed action would not have an individual or cumulatively substantial adverse impact on EFH or federally managed fisheries in the Atlantic Ocean. Our final determination relative to project impacts to EFH and the need for mitigation measures are subject to review by and coordination with the NMFS and the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council.

Endangered Species: A preliminary review the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service’s Protected Resource Divisions (NMFS)’s list of Endangered and Threatened Species (IPaC) indicates the following listed species may occur in the project area: West Indian manatee (Trichechus manatus), Eastern Indigo Snake (Drymarchon corais couperi), Wood stork (Mycteria Americana), red cockaded woodpecker (Picoides borealis) and pondberry (Lindera melissifolia). In addition, both the Atlantic sturgeon (Acipenser oxyrinchus oxyrinchus), Shortnose sturgeon (Acipenser breviostrum), have the potential to be in the vicinity of the project.
Per the Savannah District Effects Determination Guidance on Endangered and Threatened Species (EDGES), the Corps has determined that the project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, the West Indian manatee provided the Corps include Manatee Special Permit Conditions a through k from the Programmatic Agreement in any draft permit for the project. In addition, per the EDGES the Corps has determined that the project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the red cockaded woodpecker and Eastern Indigo snake.

Pursuant to Section 7(c) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. § 1531 et seq.), we request information from the U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service; or, any other interested party, on whether any other species listed or proposed for listing may be present in the area.

Public Interest Review: The decision whether to issue a permit would be based on an evaluation of the probable impact including cumulative impacts of the proposed activity on the public interest. That decision would reflect the national concern for both protection and utilization of important resources. The benefit, which reasonably may be expected to accrue from the proposal, must be balanced against its reasonably foreseeable detriments. All factors, which may be relevant to the proposal would be considered including the cumulative effects thereof; among those are conservation, economics, aesthetics, general environmental concerns, wetlands, historic properties, fish and wildlife values, flood hazards, flood plain values, land use, navigation, shoreline erosion and accretion, recreation, water supply and conservation, water quality, energy needs, safety, food and fiber production, mineral needs, considerations of property ownership and in general, the needs and welfare of the people.

Consideration of Public Comments: The Corps 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 this proposed activity. Any comments received would be considered by the Corps to determine whether to issue, modify, condition or deny a permit for this proposal. To make this decision, comments are used to assess impacts on endangered species, historic properties, water quality, general environmental effects, and the other public interest factors listed above. Comments are used in the preparation of an Environmental Assessment and/or an Environmental Impact Statement 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.

Application of Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines: The proposed activity involves the discharge of dredged or fill material into the waters of the United States. The Savannah District's evaluation of the impact of the activity on the public interest would include application of the guidelines promulgated by the Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency, under the authority of Section 404(b) of the Clean Water Act.
Public Hearing: Any person may request, in writing, within the comment period specified in this notice, that a public hearing be held to consider this application for a Department of the Army permit. Requests for public hearings shall state, with particularity, the reasons for requesting a public hearing. The decision whether to hold a public hearing is at the discretion of the District Engineer, or his designated appointee, based on the need for additional substantial information necessary in evaluating the proposed project.

Comment Period: Anyone wishing to comment on this application for a Department of the Army permit should submit comments by email to sarah.e.wise@usace.army.mil Alternatively, you may submit comments in writing to the Commander, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District, Attention: Mrs. Sarah E. Wise, 100 West Oglethorpe Avenue Savannah, Georgia 31401-3604, no later than 30 days from the date of this notice. Please refer to the applicant's name and the application number in your comments.

If you have any further questions concerning this matter, please contact Ms. Sarah E. Wise, Team Lead, Coastal Branch at 912-652-5550 or by email at sarah.e.wise@usace.army.mil.

Enclosure:
1. Georgia Ports Authority, Garden City Terminal, Savannah, Georgia, Permit Drawings, Sheets S-001-S-002; S-110-S-111; S-301-S-303; and S-501.