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National Environmental Policy Act to be topic of public meetings

Hurricane Storm Damage Reduction Systems on fast track

Three public meetings will be held to solicit comments on the process the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) proposes to use to investigate the environmental impacts of proposed improvements to the Lake Pontchartrain and West Bank and Vicinity Hurricane Storm Damage Reduction Systems.

Meeting Schedule:

Monday, Feb. 12, 2007

3 p.m. Alario Center, 2000 Segnette Blvd., Westwego

7 p.m. UNO, Lindy Boggs International Conference Center, 2000 Lakeshore Drive, New Orleans

Tuesday, Feb. 13, 2007

7 p.m. Pontchartrain Center, 4545 Williams Blvd, Kenner

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires all Federal agencies to consider the impacts of their projects to the human environment prior to starting construction of a proposed action. The impacts of large and complex civil works projects are traditionally analyzed via a process that can take several years to complete.

The USACE deems improving levees, floodwalls and other storm damage reduction features to be an emergency, critical to the future of New Orleans. Given this emergency situation, USACE is proposing an alternative process to comply with NEPA that provides an in-depth analysis and consideration of environmental impacts while allowing expedient construction of critical storm damage reduction features.

The National Environmental Policy Act provides that if a Federal agency must take emergency actions to prevent or reduce imminent risk of life, health, property or severe economic losses, it can propose alternative means to comply with the law. According to Gib Owen, environmental coordinator for the Hurricane Storm Damage Reduction System, "Our goal in using alternative arrangements is to improve our area's defenses against severe storms in an expedited way while still upholding the spirit and intent of the law."

The USACE's proposed process will include extensive opportunity for public involvement in project planning, including monthly public meetings and the solicitation of public comment via nationally distributed newspapers.

The meetings are hosted by the President's Council on Environmental Quality and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.