

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT TIGER PASS MARSH/RIDGE RESTORATION LOUISIANA COASTAL AREA (LCA) BENEFICIAL USE OF DREDGED MATERIAL PROGRAM (BUDMAT) PLAQUEMINES PARISH, LOUISIANA

EA # 542

Description of the Action. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), New Orleans District (CEMVN), in cooperation with its non-Federal sponsor, Plaquemines Parish Government of Louisiana, is proposing to restore a portion (approximately 5,000 feet) of the historic ridge that ran along the banks of the Spanish Pass and create a 500 foot wide intermediate marsh platform along the north side of the ridge. The project would utilize dredged material removed during maintenance dredging of the hopper dredge disposal area (HDDA), a dredge disposal area utilized in connection with maintenance dredging of principal Mississippi River shipping channels between the Gulf of Mexico and the Head of Passes. The proposed ridge would be located on the western side of the Mississippi River in the vicinity of Tiger Pass near Venice, Louisiana and would begin approximately 1.9 miles west of LA Hwy 23 in Venice and continue to the west along the north side of Spanish Pass. It would be constructed to an estimated elevation of +6.5-ft NAVD88 with a 200-ft wide base. Dredge materials stored in the HDDA, would be removed using a cutterhead suction dredge, loaded onto hopper barges transported by tugboat to a designated pump-out location where it would be unloaded and pumped through a floating pipeline to designated fill placement areas at the proposed disposal site. Earthen retentions dikes, closures and weirs would be constructed at each fill placement area in order to maximize retention of the dredged fill to promote the development of the wetlands, as well as to prevent the material from entering adjacent lands, waterways, and pipeline rights-of-way which run through the proposed placement areas in two locations. The retention dikes would be expected to settle over time and would be allowed to vegetate naturally. If determined necessary by USACE, these retention dikes would be later breached or degraded to the settled elevations of the disposal area by the project's non-federal sponsor. EA #542 provides detailed information regarding the construction of the proposed action.

This project is being proposed under the Louisiana Coastal Area (LCA) Beneficial Use of Dredged Material (BUDMAT) Program which has an approved Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) entitled *Louisiana Coastal Area Beneficial Use of Dredge Material Programmatic EIS* and Record of Decision (ROD) dated 13 August 2010. This EA #542 tiers off of the LCA BUDMAT Programmatic EIS. Activities like the proposed activity conducted under the LCA BUDMAT program optimize the use of dredged materials resulting from the maintenance of federally maintained navigation channels for ecosystem restoration beneficial use projects that are located beyond the Federal Standard.

Factors Considered in Determination. This office has assessed the impacts of no action and the proposed action on important resources, including navigation, wetlands, scrub-shrub, wildlife, aquatic resources/fisheries, essential fish habitat (EFH), threatened and endangered (T&E) species, water and sediment quality, air quality, cultural resources, recreational resources, and visual resources (aesthetics). For the proposed action, no significant adverse impacts were identified for any of these important resources. A Phase I hazardous, toxic, and radioactive wastes (HTRW) investigation was completed on xxxx and the risk of encountering HTRW on this project is considered low. No impacts have been identified that would require compensatory mitigation and all practical means of avoiding adverse environmental effects have been adopted. Earthen retention dikes, closures and weirs would be constructed at each site to maximize retention of the dredged fill to promote development of the wetlands, as well as to prevent the material from entering adjacent lands, waterways, and pipeline rights-of-way. The retention dikes would be expected to settle over time and would be allowed to vegetate naturally. If determined to be necessary by USACE, these retention dikes would be later breached or degraded to the settled elevation by the non-federal sponsor. The project overall will result in a net benefit to wetland resources in the project area, with the creation of emergent wetland habitat of higher value to fish and wildlife resources than the existing open water.

In a letter dated October 20, 2015, USFWS confirmed that the proposed project is not likely to adversely affect any threatened or endangered species that may occur in the area. In a letter dated December 4, 2015, the LDNR concurred with the determination that the proposed action is consistent, to the maximum extent practicable, with the Louisiana Coastal Resources Program. LDEQ issued a State Water Quality Certification on xxxx. The Section 404(b)(1) was signed on xxxx. In a letter dated May 20, 2015, the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with a recommendation of no effect on historic properties. This office has concurred with, or resolved, all Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act recommendations contained in a letter from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service dated xxxx. CEMVN has concurred with, or resolved, all comments addressing essential fish habitat contained in a letter from the National Marine Fisheries Service dated xxxx.

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

- 1) Any design changes that may cause potential impacts to the human environment would be evaluated to determine whether additional NEPA analysis would be required.
- 2) If any unrecorded cultural resources are determined to exist within the project area boundaries, a CEMVN-PDR-RN archeologist would be notified and final coordination with the SHPO and THPO would occur. [CEMVN-PDR-RN/SHPO Standard Operating Procedure]
- 3) If the proposed action is changed significantly or is not implemented within one year, CEMVN will reinitiate coordination with the USFWS to ensure that the proposed action would not adversely affect any Federally-listed threatened or endangered species, or their habitat, as per USFWS letter dated October 20, 2015.

- 4) Consideration will be given in the design of project features and timing of construction in an effort to avoid adverse impacts to wading bird colonies. A qualified biologist will inspect the proposed work site for the presence of undocumented nesting colonies during the nesting season.
- 5) For areas containing nesting wading birds (i.e., herons, egrets, night-herons, ibis, and roseate spoonbills), anhingas, and/or cormorants, all activity occurring within 1,000 feet of a nesting colony will be restricted to the non-nesting period. For nesting brown pelicans activity should be avoided within 2,000 feet of the colony. Activity is restricted within 650 feet of black skimmers, gulls, and terns.
- 6) All on-site personnel are responsible for observing water-related activities for the presence of manatee(s). All work, equipment, and vessel operation should cease if a manatee is spotted within a 50-foot radius (buffer zone) of the active work area. Once the manatee has left the buffer zone of its own accord (manatees must not be herded or harassed into leaving), or after 30 minutes have passed without additional sightings of manatee(s) in the buffer zone, in-water work can resume under careful observation for manatee(s).

Public Involvement. The proposed action has been coordinated with appropriate federal, state, and local agencies and businesses, organizations, and individuals through distribution of EA #542 on xxxx for their review and comment. X comments were received from _____ . The majority of the comments pertained to _____ . Other comments pertaining to _____ have been addressed. X agency comments were received stating _____. EA #542 is attached hereto, incorporated herein by reference and made a part of this FONSI.

Conclusion. This office has assessed the potential environmental impacts of the proposed action and has determined that it would have beneficial environmental effects through the creation of wetlands habitats as discussed in EA #542. Based on this assessment, which is attached hereto and made a part hereof, a review of the comments made on EA #542, and the implementation of the environmental design commitments listed above, a determination has been made that the proposed action would have no significant impact on the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared.

Date

RICHARD L. HANSEN
Colonel, EN
Commanding