



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
MOBILE DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS  
P.O. BOX 2288  
MOBILE, ALABAMA 36628-0001

REPLY TO  
ATTENTION OF:

**PUBLIC NOTICE NO. FP14-SJ03-05  
CESAM-PD-EC**

**JULY 15, 2014**

### **JOINT PUBLIC NOTICE**

**U. S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, MOBILE DISTRICT  
AND  
FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION  
FOR  
PORT ST. JOE NAVIGATION CHANNEL  
CONTINUED OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE DREDGING  
GULF COUNTY, FLORIDA**

#### **A FEDERALLY AUTHORIZED NAVIGATION PROJECT**

Interested persons are hereby notified that the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Mobile District proposes continued maintenance dredging and sediment placement activities associated with the federally authorized Port St. Joe navigation project, Gulf County, Florida.

This Public Notice is issued in accordance with the rules and regulations published in the Federal Register on April 26, 1988. These regulations provide for the review of the dredging programs for federally authorized projects. These laws are considered whenever dredged or fill materials may enter navigable waters. We request that the recipient of this notice review the proposed action as it may impact water quality, relative to the requirements of Section 404(b)(1) of the Clean Water Act. Comments on any other potential impacts are also requested.

**WATERWAY AND LOCATION:** Saint Joseph Bay, Port St. Joe, Gulf County, Florida.

**DESCRIPTION OF ENTIRE AUTHORIZED PROJECT:** This project was federally authorized by the Rivers and Harbors Act of March 2, 1945 and September 3, 1954. The existing Federal project provides for: (a) an Entrance Channel 37 feet deep, 500 feet wide at its outer end and diminishing progressively in width to 400 feet at the first bend (a distance of 3.6 miles), continuing at a depth of 37 feet and a width of 400 feet through the second and third bend (a distance of 3.3 miles), continuing at a depth of 35 feet and a width of 300 feet (a distance of 2.4 miles) to a point in St. Joseph Bay where the entrance channel joins the North Channel (a total distance of 9.3 miles); (b) continuing in the North Channel at a depth of 35 feet and a width of 300 feet to the north

end of the Turning Basin at Port St. Joe (a distance of about 4.7 miles); (c) a Turning Basin 32 feet deep, 1,000 feet wide, and 2,000 feet long; (d) a Harbor Channel therein 35 feet deep, 250 feet wide, and 2,000 feet long, adjacent to the waterfront at Port St. Joe; and (e) a South Channel 27 feet deep, 200 feet wide and about one mile long leading from the south end of the turning basin to deep water in St. Joseph Bay (**Figure 1**).

**DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION:** The proposed action is the periodic maintenance dredging of the federally authorized Port St. Joe navigation channel located in St. Joseph Bay. Maintenance of the project consists of the removal and placement of approximately five million cubic yards of fine sands, silts, and clays. The dredge depth includes an authorized design depth of -37 feet Mean Lower Low Water (MLLW) for the Entrance Channel, -35 feet MLLW for the North and Harbor Channel, -32 feet MLLW for the Turning Basin, and taking no action on the South Channel. In addition, two (2) feet of advance maintenance and an over dredge depth of two (2) feet is authorized for each segment of the channel. Maintenance dredging of soft-dredged material with a hydraulic dredge may disturb the bottom sediments several feet deeper than the target depth due to the physical conditions and inaccuracies of the dredging process. Three (3) feet of sediments below the 2-foot over dredge depth cut may be disturbed in the dredging process with minor amounts of material being removed. The sediment removed during maintenance activities would be placed in the contained upland placement areas as shown in **Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5** of this document.

This proposed action also involves a slight channel realignment which would occur near the far northeastern end of St. Joseph Point. The north-south 15,000 foot long channel segment would be shifted 300 feet to the east to preserve shorebird habitat and reduce the amount of dredging required to reestablish the existing channel. The new proposed relocation of the channel is shown in **Figures 6 and 7**. In addition, a 2,200-foot long by 150-foot wide portion of the channel would be modified and constructed near the tip of St. Joseph Peninsula to act as a sediment basin (or "sand trap"). By dredging the channel wider in this area, it provides space for the shoaling to occur without encroaching on the channel and interfering with navigation. This sediment basin will reduce the dredging frequency, which in turn reduces operations and maintenance (O&M) costs and environmental impacts. See Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) at <http://www.sam.usace.army.mil/Missions/PlanningEnvironmental.aspx> for additional details. Continued maintenance of the channel is anticipated to be required every 3 to 5 years based on previous records.

**WATER QUALITY CERTIFICATION:** Pursuant to the Clean Water Act, state water quality certification under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act is required for the proposed action. Water quality certification for the proposed activities associated with the Port St. Joe navigation project will be requested from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP).

**COASTAL ZONE CONSISTENCY:** Pursuant to the Coastal Zone Management Act, the USACE, Mobile District has made a determination that the proposed action is consistent with the FDEP's program to the maximum extent practicable. Coastal zone consistency under Section 307 of the Coastal Management Act will be requested from the FDEP.

**NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (NEPA) CONSIDERATIONS:** An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was prepared in 1973 for the O&M dredging activities for the portion of the waterway within the USACE, Mobile District's jurisdiction. State water quality was issued and the project was last dredged in 1986. Since completion of this NEPA documentation, several changes in the environmental setting and laws and regulations have resulted, such as the listing of Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) and the threatened Gulf sturgeon and its designated critical habitat, delisting of the bald eagle to protection under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, and implementation of Executive Order 12898 – Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations and Executive Order 13045 - Protection of Children from Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks. The Draft EA is available for review upon request and a copy is located at <http://www.sam.usace.army.mil/Missions/PlanningEnvironmental.aspx>. Based on comments to this public notice, the District Commander will determine the need to incorporate those comments and update the NEPA documents.

**SECTION 404(b)(1) EVALUATION:** A Draft Section 404(b)(1) Evaluation Report has been prepared in accordance with guidelines promulgated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) under Section 404(b)(1) of the Clean Water Act to address the impacts associated with the continued O&M activities. The Draft Section 404(b)(1) Evaluation Report is available for review upon request and is also at <http://www.sam.usace.army.mil/Missions/PlanningEnvironmental.aspx>. Should comments be received that warrant consideration, the Section 404(b)(1) report will be updated. Based on comments to this public notice, the District Commander will determine the need to incorporate those comments and update the NEPA documents.

**ENDANGERED AND THREATENED SPECIES:** In compliance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, the proposed action will be coordinated with the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Protected Resources Division (PRD) and the U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Based on review of the threatened and endangered species that could occur within the Port St. Joe project area in the State of Florida, USACE, Mobile District has determined that the proposed action may affect but not likely to adversely affect any listed species or adversely modify associated critical habitat.

**ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT:** EFH is defined in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA) as " those waters and substrate

Mexico Fishery Management Council in accordance with the MSFCMA (PL 94-265) has developed management plans for the following fisheries: shrimp, red drum, reef fish, stone crab, spiny lobster, coral and coral reef and coastal migratory pelagic. The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Plans (2012) identifies EFH in the project area to be inter-tidal wetlands, submerged aquatic vegetation, non-vegetated bottoms, shell reefs and the estuarine water column. Major fisheries landed along the Gulf Coast include red drum, mullet, croaker, shrimp, blue crab, and oyster. Habitat associated with these species include estuarine areas, such as estuarine emergent wetlands, seagrass beds, algal flats, and mud, sand, shell and rock substrates. The habitat within the vicinity of the project consists of estuarine waters, shell, sand, and silt substrate, estuarine emergent wetlands, and seagrass beds.

The Draft EA describes the proposed action and analyzes the direct and indirect effects on EFHs for the managed fish species, their habitat and their major food sources. The proposed action will not significantly affect coastal habitat identified as EFH in the project area because most of the impacts will be temporary in nature. Species identified to be present within the project area are motile and will likely exit the area upon initiation of dredging operations. Based on an overall assessment of the project, USACE, Mobile District found the impacts to fisheries resources associated with the proposed project would not have a long-term adverse effect on EFH. Coordination for EFH procedures is being initiated through publication of this public notice and official letter.

**CULTURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS:** The Port St. Joe navigation project was authorized by Congress and completed more than 50 years ago. The existing channel and original disposal area was constructed and operated prior to the enactment of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), which was signed into law in 1966. This project was consulted with the Florida Department of State Division of Archives, History and Records Management back in the 1980s. However, since the proposed project will be using a slightly modified section of navigation channel, the USACE, Mobile District will initiate consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) during the recertification process to obtain concurrence. Copies of this notice are being forwarded to the Florida State Historic Preservation Officer, the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service in Atlanta, Georgia and federally recognized tribes with an interest in the area.

**FARMLAND PROTECTION POLICY ACT (FPPA) CONSIDERATIONS:** The proposed action does not involve the placement of dredged material on any farmland. Therefore provisions of the FPPA are not applicable.

**USE BY OTHERS:** Portions of the proposed project area are adjacent to developed shoreline. The proposed action for the Port St. Joe navigation project is not expected to cause any significant land use changes in the adjacent areas. Use of waters in the vicinity of the navigation channel and sediment placement site includes fishing, recreational boating, and scallop harvesting.

**EVALUATION:** The decision whether to proceed with the proposed action will be based on evaluating the probable impact including cumulative impacts of the proposed activity on the public interest. That decision will reflect the national concern for both protection and utilization of important resources. The benefits that may be reasonably expected to occur from the proposal must be balanced against its reasonably foreseeable detriments. All factors which may be relevant to the proposal will be considered including the cumulative effects thereof; among those are general environmental concerns, wetlands, historic properties, fish and wildlife values, navigation, recreation, water quality, and in general the needs and welfare of the people. The proposed action will proceed unless it is found to be contrary to the overall public interest.

**COORDINATION:** Agencies receiving copies of this public notice include but is not limited to:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 4  
U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service,  
Panama City, Florida Field Office  
U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service  
U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric  
Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service, Protected Species  
and Habitat Conservation Divisions, St. Petersburg, Florida  
State of Florida, Department of Environmental Protection  
State of Florida, Fish and Wildlife Commission  
State of Florida, State Historic Preservation Officer  
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council  
Commander, Eighth Coast Guard District  
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Federally recognized tribes with an interest in the area of potential effect

Other Federal, State and local organizations, United States Senators and Representatives of Florida are being sent copies of this notice and are requested to participate in coordinating review of this proposed action. The USACE, Mobile District requests that parties communicate information included in this public notice to others that may have an interest in the proposed action.

**CORRESPONDENCE:** Any party that has an interest that may be affected by this proposed activity may request a public hearing. Any comments or request for hearing must clearly set forth the interests that may be affected and the manner in which the interest may be affected. Correspondence concerning this public notice should be received within 30 days of this publication. Correspondence should reference Public Notice No. FP14-SJ03-05 and should be addressed to the District Commander, U.S. Army Engineer District, Mobile, P.O. Box 2288, Mobile, Alabama 36628-0001, Attention

**July 15, 2014**

CESAM-PD-EC. Mr. Michael Malsom, Planning and Environmental Division, Coastal Environment Team may be contacted at 251-690-2023 or michael.f.malsom@usace.army.mil for additional information.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Curtis M. Flakes', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**CURTIS M. FLAKES**  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
Mobile District

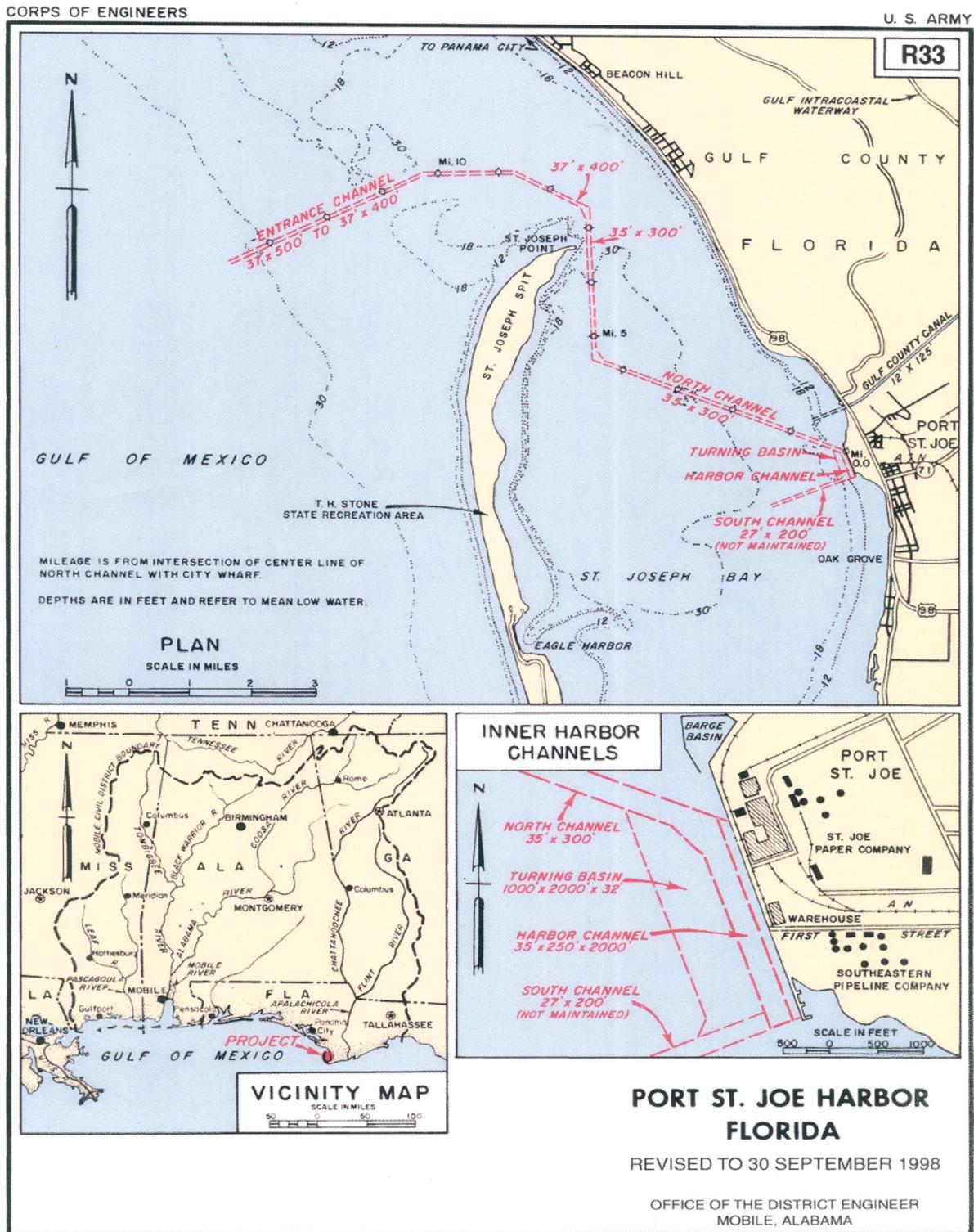


Figure 1. Project Map of Mobile District Federally Authorized Port St. Joe Navigation Channel

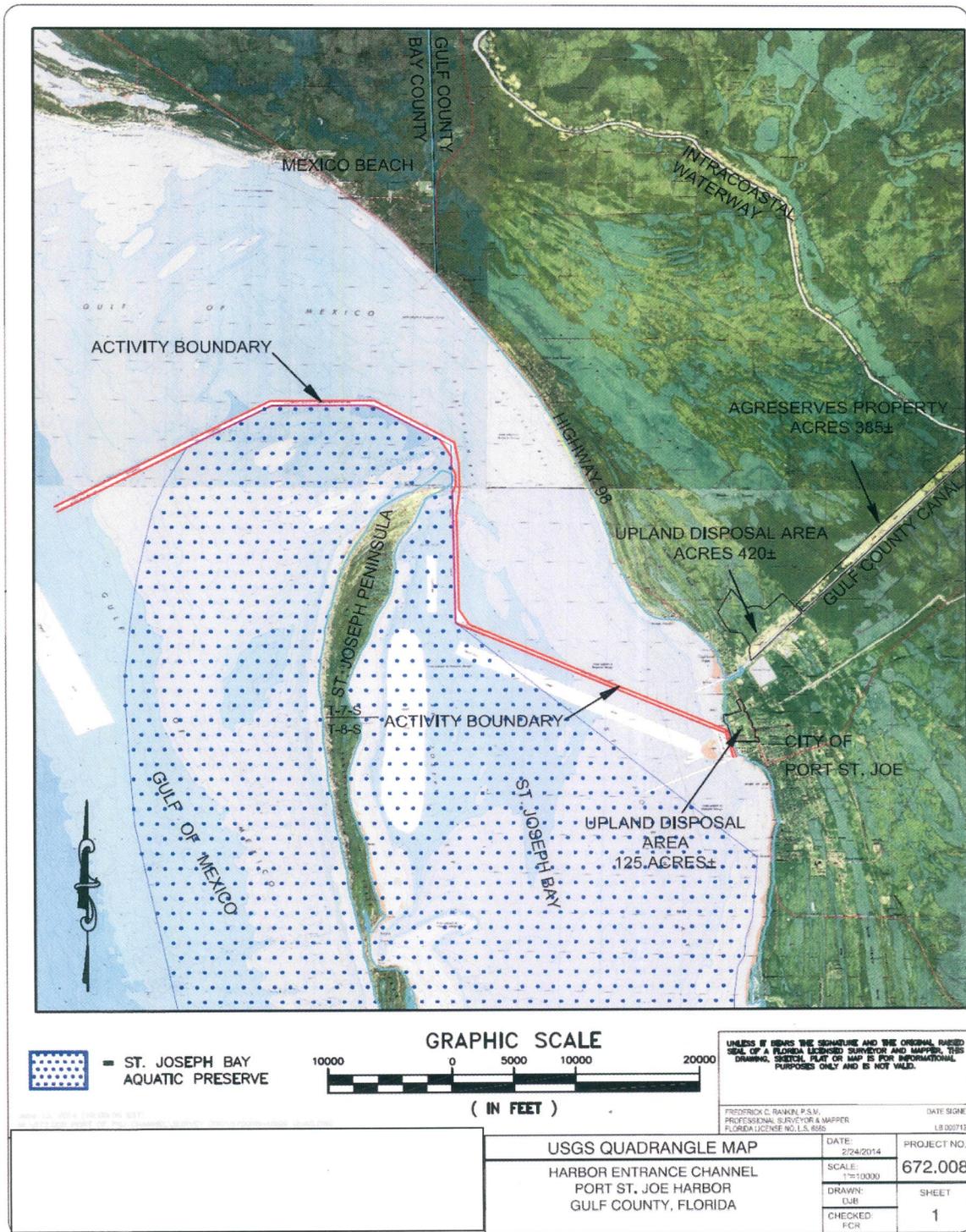


Figure 2. Port St. Joe Navigation Project Dredged Material Placement Areas



Figure 3. Gulf Intracoastal Waterway 425 Acre Sediment Placement Area DA#10 A, B, and C



Figure 4. Tier 1 Proposed 125 Acre Sediment Placement Site / Former Paper Mill Site

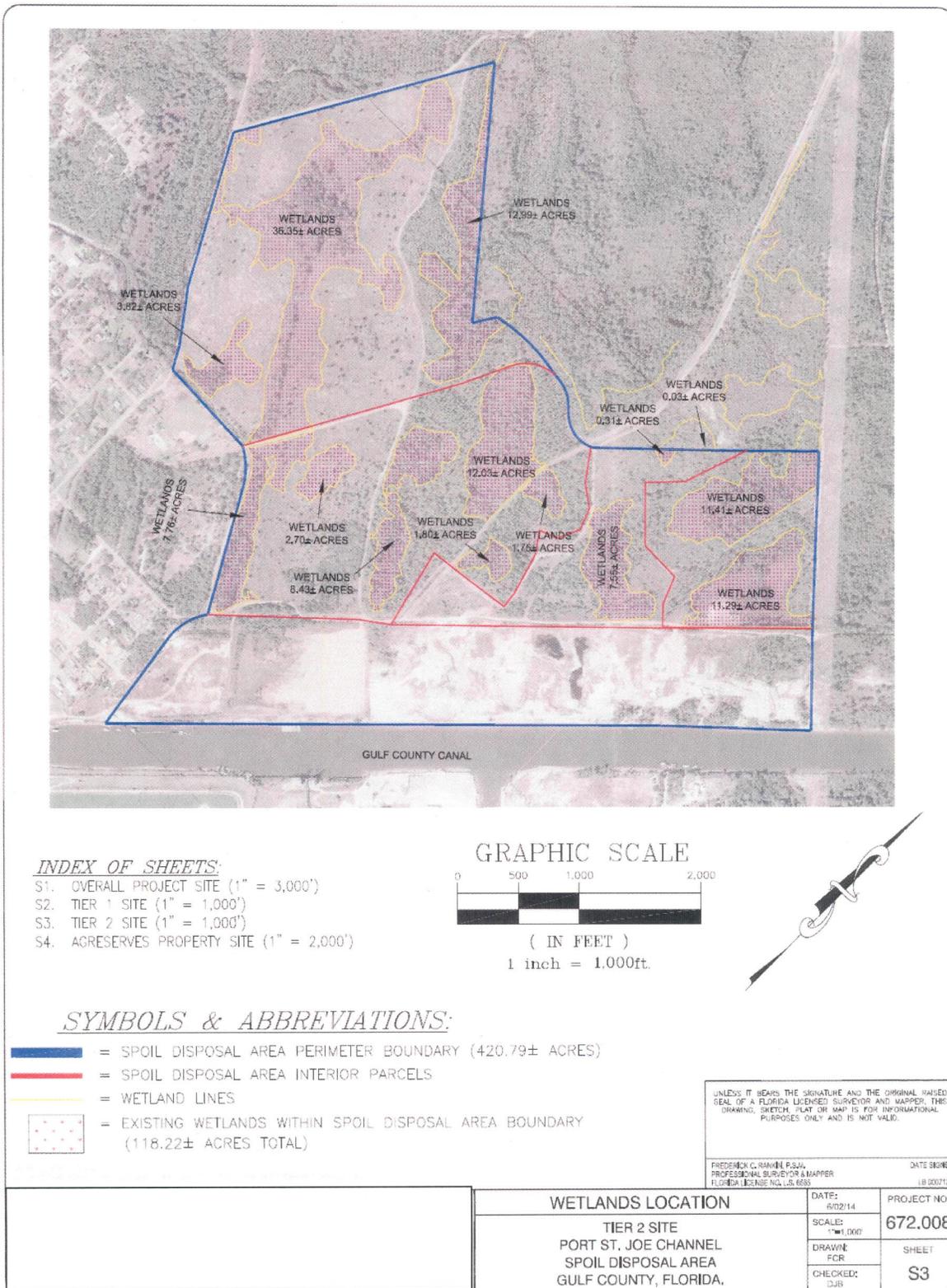


Figure 5. Tier 2 Proposed 421 Acre Woodland Sediment Placement

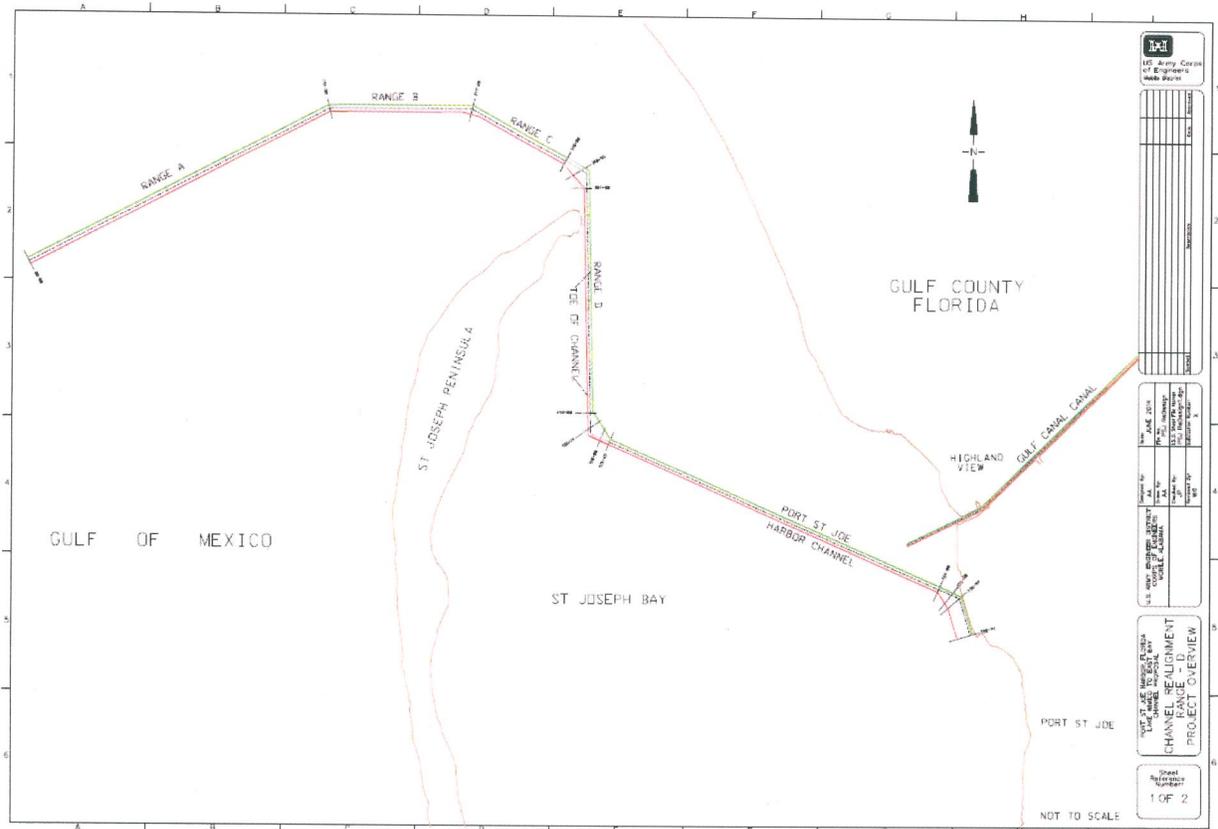


Figure 6. Port St. Joe Navigation Channel

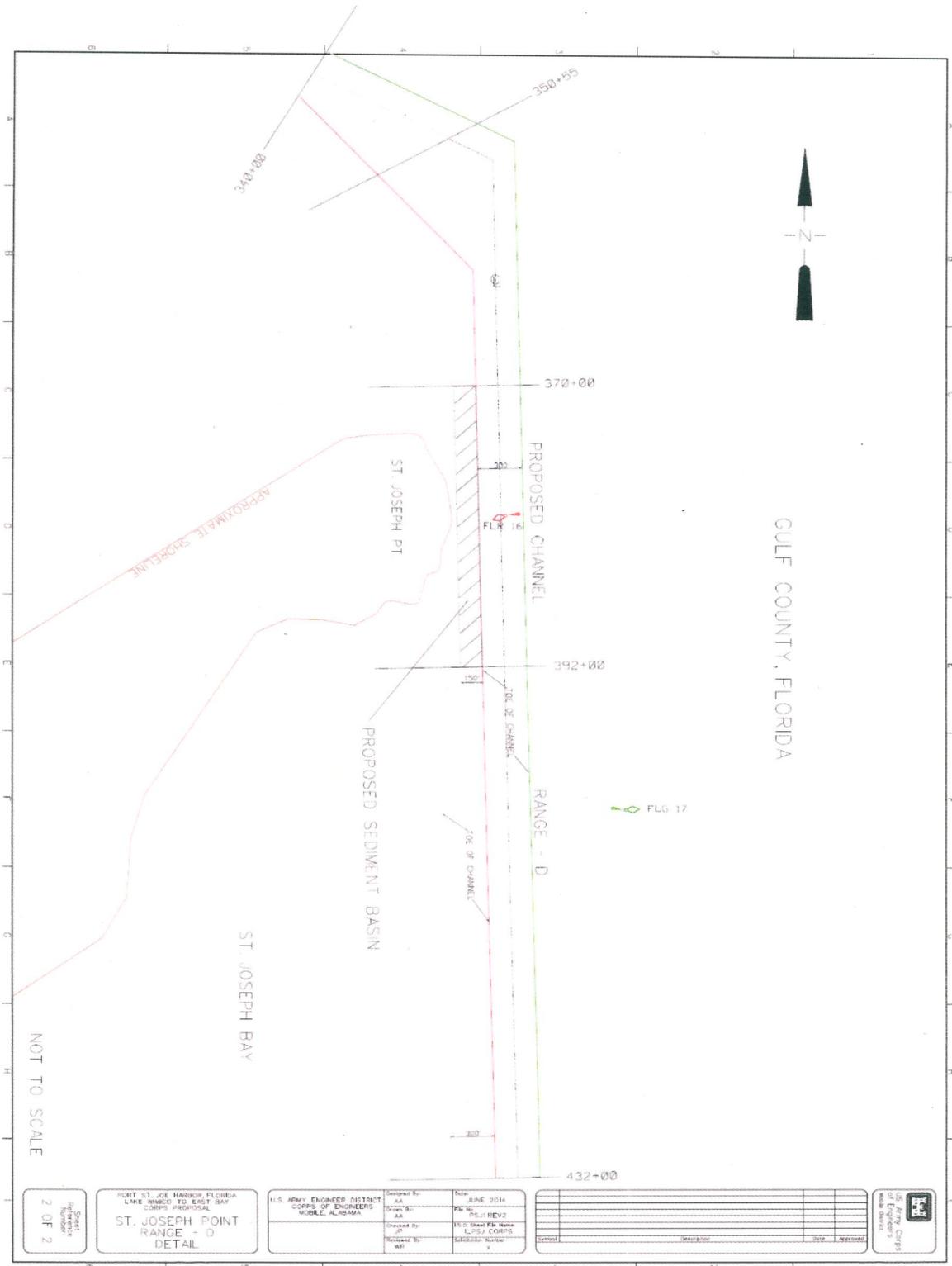


Figure 7. Navigation Channel Relocation and Sediment Basin Map near St. Joseph Point