



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

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

CESAM-PD-EC
PUBLIC NOTICE NO. FP07-PA07-03

23 January 2007

JOINT PUBLIC NOTICE

**U. S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS,
MOBILE DISTRICT**

**MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY,
OFFICE OF POLLUTION CONTROL**

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES

**MAINTENANCE DREDGING AND PLACEMENT
ACTIVITIES**

**JACKSON COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI
PASCAGOULA HARBOR, MISSISSIPPI**

Interested persons are hereby notified that the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District proposes continued maintenance dredging and placement activities associated with the federally authorized Pascagoula Harbor Navigation Project, Pascagoula, Jackson County, Mississippi. Dredged material would be placed in previously approved open-water, littoral zone, upland, and ocean dredged material disposal areas.

This Public Notice is issued in accordance with the rules and regulations published in the Federal Register on 26 April 1988. 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: Mississippi Sound, the Gulf of Mexico, Pascagoula River and Bayou Casotte.

DESCRIPTION OF ENTIRE AUTHORIZED PROJECT: The authorized Pascagoula Harbor, Mississippi Navigation Project includes the following channels:

a. An entrance channel 44 feet deep and 550 feet wide from the Gulf of Mexico to Horn Island Pass, including a 2,200-foot long by 200-foot wide sediment trap situated on the east side of the channel, a channel 44 feet deep and 600 feet wide through Horn Island Pass, including a 4,700-foot long sediment trap situated on the east side of the channel 44 feet deep and 175 feet wide;

b. A channel 42 feet deep and 350 feet wide in Mississippi Sound and the Pascagoula River to the railroad bridge at Pascagoula, including a turning basin 2,000 feet long and 950 feet wide (including the channel area) on the west side of the river below the railroad bridge;

c. A channel 42 feet deep throughout and 350 feet wide from the ship channel in Mississippi Sound to the 1,150-foot turning basin at the mouth of Bayou Casotte, then 350 feet wide for about one mile to the northern turning basin, 900 feet wide and 1,750 feet long;

d. A channel 22 feet deep and 150 feet wide up Pascagoula River from the railroad bridge to the mouth of Escatawpa River (Dog River), thence up the Escatawpa River to the Highway 613 Bridge;

e. A channel 12 feet deep and 125 feet wide from the Highway 613 Bridge, via Robertson and Bounds Lakes to mile 6.0 on the Escatawpa River; and

f. A channel 12 feet deep by 80 feet by 80 feet extending from deep water in the Pascagoula River to a turning basin in Krebs Lake a distance of about 1,500 feet, then along the south bank of the lake a channel 10 feet deep and 60 feet wide, terminating at a second turning basin, a distance of 2,700 feet from the first.

PROPOSED ACTION: The proposed action involves maintenance dredging and placement activities associated with the federally-authorized Pascagoula Harbor, Mississippi Navigation Project (**Figure 1**). Pascagoula Harbor consists of both a harbor portion and a river portion.

Pascagoula Harbor:

Authorized and existing dimensions may differ in the Pascagoula Harbor Navigation Project. An additional -2 feet of advanced maintenance plus -2 feet of overdepth dredging will be added to each project section. In order to maintain the Pascagoula Harbor Navigation Project, maintenance dredging would be performed on an as needed basis. Approximately 2,000,000 cubic yards of material would be removed from various channel segments identified in above sections a, b, and c of the Pascagoula Harbor Navigation Project every dredging cycle with average dredging cycles occurring every 18 to 36 months. However, not all portions require maintenance dredging every dredging cycle. Therefore, both the location and quantity of materials to be dredged are dependent upon where shoaling occurs. Typically, a hopper dredge is used to maintain the outer portion of the entrance channel with material placement in the Pascagoula Ocean Dredged Material Disposal Site (ODMDS) while a hydraulic pipeline dredge is used to maintain the remainder of the project utilizing open-water, littoral, and upland disposal sites. Dredging cycles and corresponding placement areas for maintenance activities associated with specific channel segments are discussed below:

Pascagoula Harbor Entrance Channel and Horn Island Pass:

Horn Island Pass is constructed to its authorized dimensions while existing dimensions for the Entrance channel consists of 44 feet deep by 450 feet wide. Material dredged from the entrance channel and Horn Island Pass would be placed in previously approved and utilized, disposal area 10 located adjacent to the channel, the littoral zone disposal area between -14 and -22-foot depth contours southeast of the east end of Horn Island, and in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designated ODMDS (**Figures 1 and 2**).

Mississippi Sound:

Lower Pascagoula and Bayou Casotte channels are constructed to their authorized dimensions. Existing dimensions of the Upper Pascagoula channel consist of 38 feet deep by 350 feet wide. Maintenance dredging and placement activities are proposed for the Lower Pascagoula, Bayou Casotte, and Upper Pascagoula channels of the Pascagoula Harbor Navigation Project (**Figure 1**). The Lower Pascagoula channel segment commences north of Horn Island Pass and concludes at the Y-junction. Material dredged from the Lower Pascagoula channel segment is placed in the previously certified open-water disposal areas 6, 7, 8, and 9 located west of the channel. Bayou Casotte channel segments begins at the Y-junction continuing north to the Bayou Casotte Inner Harbor. Open-water disposal areas 3 and 4, located east of the channel, are utilized for material dredged from the Bayou Casotte channel. Material dredged from the Upper Pascagoula channel, extending from the Y-junction north to the Pascagoula Inner Harbor, is disposed of in open-water disposal areas 5, 6, 7 and 8 and the upland placement area "Triple Barrel." Hurricane Katrina reconfigured Mississippi Sound's bathymetry, specifically open-water disposal sites (5 and 6-North). Until recently, these historically used open-water sites did not have sufficient depths (i.e. greater than -4-foot) to accommodate material. Adjustments to the dredged material management plan to preserve long-term management of these upland and open-water sites could include disposing of material dredged from Mississippi Sound at the ODMDS (**Figure 2**).

Pascagoula Inner Harbor:

The Pascagoula Inner Harbor consists of a channel 38 feet deep by 350 feet wide with a turning basin 38 feet deep, 2,000 feet long, and 950 feet wide (including the channel area) on the west side of the river below the railroad bridge. Maintenance dredging and placement activities are proposed for the Pascagoula Inner Harbor channel segment of the Pascagoula Harbor Navigation Project (**Figure 1**). The river portion channel segment is located below the CSX railroad bridge situated at the north end of the Pascagoula Harbor Navigation Project. Maintenance material to be dredged from the Pascagoula River channel portion of the Pascagoula Harbor Navigation Project would be placed in previously utilized and approved upland placement area known as "Triple Barrel." Dredged material could also be placed in the open-water disposal areas 5 and 6 and the ODMDS in order to preserve long-term management of the upland site (**Figure 2**).

Bayou Casotte Inner Harbor:

Authorized and existing project dimensions are the same for the Bayou Casotte Inner Harbor channel and turning basins. Material dredged during maintenance of the Bayou Casotte Inner

Harbor channel and the southern and northern turning basins would be placed in the upland placement area known as the Bayou Casotte Dredged Material Management Site (BCDMMS) or the ODMDS (Figures 1 and 2).

Pascagoula River:

Channel segments described in paragraphs (d), (e), and (f) above in the “Description of the Entire Authorized Project” are identified as the Pascagoula River portion. The only area proposed for dredging is from River Mile 0.0 to 5.0 or a distance of approximately 29,500 feet (Figure 3). No dredging is proposed in the Escatawpa River. While the majority of the material removed during the past maintenance cycle was located within two smaller segments of the 5-mile portion of the Pascagoula River, these segments are subject to change and the proposed action may include any segment(s) located within the 5-mile reach. The proposed action requires the dredged material from the 5-mile portion of the Pascagoula Harbor project to be placed within any of the nine previously certified upland disposal sites (Figures 4 & 5). The river channel would be dredged to a depth of -22 feet plus an additional allowance of up to 2 feet advanced maintenance and 2 feet overdepth dredging. Based on previous maintenance dredging of the 5-mile segment, it is expected that approximately 50,000-70,000 cubic yards of dredged material would be removed from the river channel and placed in any of the previously certified upland disposal sites. Four of the disposal sites are located on the west bank of the river and five are located on the east side of the river and vary in size from two to 18 acres. Disposal sites 1#, #2, #3, #4, and #6 (Figure 3) were previously used during maintenance dredging operations of the river channel. Sites #5, #7, #8, and #9 (Figures 4 & 5) have not been used to date, but may be required depending on shoaling locations.

<u>Sites</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Site size (Acres)</u>
1	East Bank	10
2	West Bank	18
3	East Bank	10
4	East Bank	7
5	East Bank	2
6	East Bank	6
7	West Bank	3
8	West Bank	14
9	West Bank	7

COASTAL BARRIER RESOURCES ACT (CBRA) CONSIDERATIONS: The Mobile District has concluded that the Pascagoula Harbor entrance channel through Horn Island Pass is located within the auspices of Unit MS-01 P the Coastal Barrier Resources System (Figure 1). The Mobile District has determined that the dredging and placement of dredged material for maintenance dredging activities associated with the Pascagoula Harbor Navigation Project would qualify as an exemption under Section 6(a)(2) of CBRA. In compliance with the CBRA, the proposed action is being coordinated with the U.S Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) by this public notice.

WATER QUALITY CERTIFICATION: Pursuant to the Clean Water Act, state water quality certification is required for the proposed action. Water quality certification for the proposed activities associated with the Pascagoula Harbor Navigation Project is being requested from the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), Office of Pollution Control (OPC) for a five-year period. A decision relative to water quality certification will be determined by MDEQ-OPC upon completion of the comment period.

COASTAL ZONE CONSISTENCY: Pursuant to the requirements of the Coastal Zone Management Act, concurrence with Mobile District's determination of coastal zone consistency is being requested for a five-year period from the State of Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR). The Mobile District has determined that the proposed action is consistent with the Mississippi Coastal Program to the maximum extent practicable. A decision relative to concurrence with coastal zone consistency will be determined by MDMR upon completion of the comment period.

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (NEPA) CONSIDERATIONS: In accordance with the requirements of the NEPA, the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for Improvements to the Pascagoula Harbor Navigation Project was filed with the Council on Environmental Quality on 12 July 1985. The State of Mississippi, Office of the Governor concurred with the FEIS by letter dated 20 August 1985. In addition, the Regional Administrator, EPA, Region 4 signed a FEIS for the ODMDS on 28 June 1991. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Director of Civil Works, signed the Record of Decision (ROD) for Pascagoula Harbor channel improvements on 24 July 1992. An Environmental Assessment (EA) for the addition of an upland placement area for materials dredged during the maintenance of the Inner Bayou Casotte Harbor portion was signed on 24 June 1998 and revised on 01 November 1999. An EA and Section 404(b)1 Evaluation were prepared to address impacts associated with the proposed action described in this public notice and a Finding of No Significant was signed in August 2002.

SECTION 404(b)(1) EVALUATION: An evaluation report was prepared in accordance with guidelines promulgated by the EPA under Section 404(b)(1) of the Clean Water Act to address the impacts associated with the proposed action in August 2002.

MARINE PROTECTION, RESEARCH AND SANCTUARIES ACT (MPSRA): In accordance with Section 103 of the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act, the proposed transport of dredged material for the purpose of placing it in ocean waters is being evaluated. It has been determined that the proposed placement will not unreasonably degrade or endanger human health, welfare or amenities of the marine environment, ecological system, or economic potentialities. In making this determination, the criterion established by the Regional Administrator, EPA, pursuant to Section 102(a) of the Ocean Disposal Act have been applied. A draft Section 103 Evaluation Report has been submitted to EPA, Region 4, Atlanta, Georgia. The Mobile District is requesting concurrence from the EPA for continued use of the Pascagoula ODMDS. The draft Section 103 Evaluation Report is available for review upon request from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District Office, Planning and Environmental Division.

ENDANGERED AND THREATENED SPECIES: In compliance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, the proposed action is being coordinated with the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the USFWS.

Critical habitat for the Gulf sturgeon within the project vicinity is identified as Units 2 and 8. Unit 2 includes the Pascagoula River while Unit 8 consists of Mississippi Sound. The primary constituent elements essential for the conservation of the Gulf sturgeon are those habitat components that support foraging, riverine spawning sites, normal flow regime, water quality, sediment quality, and safe unobstructed migratory pathways. The Pascagoula River and Mississippi Sound system provides feeding, water quality, sediment quality, and migration habitat for Gulf sturgeon. Pascagoula Harbor and its vicinity are highly industrialized areas. Gulf sturgeon favor the West Pascagoula River for its migration due to the industrialization associated with the east side. Gulf sturgeon actually utilizing the project area is very unlikely. Gulf sturgeon have been identified between the barrier islands' passes potentially feeding. The Corps, Mobile District utilizes a hopper dredge with trained observers and screens to monitor those activities; furthermore, these operations are covered by the Regional Biological Opinion entitled "Dredging of the Gulf of Mexico Navigational Channels and Sand Mining ("Borrow") Areas Using Hopper Dredges by Corps Galveston, New Orleans, Mobile, and Jacksonville Districts." The remaining project is maintained via a hydraulic pipeline dredge. Gulf sturgeon are not adversely impacted by hydraulic dredges according to the guidance provided in this Regional Biological Opinion. Furthermore, the dredges and other heavy equipment would also not adversely impact the sturgeon because we anticipate that they would temporarily avoid the project areas due to the elevated noise level. Finally, at no time would the river be blocked; therefore, if one happens to be within the project area, the Gulf sturgeon would be able to move throughout the adjacent area. Based on review of endangered and threatened species that could occur within the project area, the Corps has determined that the proposed action would not affect any listed species or their critical habitat.

ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT: Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) is defined in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA) as "...those waters and substrate necessary to fish spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth to maturity." The Gulf of 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 (1999) 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 menhaden (*Brevoortia patronus*), mullet (*Mugil cephalus*), croaker (*Micropogonias undulatus* and *Leiostomus xanthurus*), shrimp (*Penaeus aztecus*, *P. setiferus*, and *P. duorarum*), blue crab (*Callinectes sapidus*), and oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*). In addition, the following species would be expected to utilize the project area: red drum (*Sciaenops ocellatus*), dolphin (*Coryphaena hippurus*), spanish mackerel (*S. maculatus*), and king mackerel (*Scomberomorus cavalla*). Studies on impacts of open-water disposal on benthic communities and fisheries resources have been undertaken nationwide for many years. Studies on fisheries resources both adult, pre-adult, and juvenile form indicate that most species are able to avoid the area of dredging and disposal or are unaffected. The proposed