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

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

CESAM-PD-EC
PUBLIC NOTICE NO. FP19-PA01-09

October 2, 2019

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 IN-CHANNEL PLACEMENT ACTIVITIES FOR ESCATAWPA RIVER

PASCAGOULA HARBOR, JACKSON COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI A FEDERALLY AUTHORIZED NAVIGATION PROJECT

Interested persons are hereby notified that the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Mobile District proposes maintenance dredging and in-channel placement activities in the Escatawpa River, which is a part of the federally authorized Pascagoula Harbor navigation project, in Jackson County, Mississippi.

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

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 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 wide 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 turning basin.

In order to maintain the Pascagoula Harbor Federal Navigation Project, maintenance dredging is performed on an as-needed basis. Approximately 2,000,000 cubic yards of material is removed from various channel segments (predominantly segments a, b, and c above) with average dredging cycles occurring every 18 to 36 months. Depending on shoaling rates, 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 ODMDS, while a cutterhead dredge is typically used to maintain the remainder of the project utilizing open-water, littoral, semi-confined and/or upland disposal sites. Due to specific project needs, funding requirements or equipment availability, a combination of hydraulic or mechanical dredging equipment may be utilized to maintain the Pascagoula Harbor Federal Navigation Project.

PROPOSED ACTION: The Escatawpa River portion of the Pascagoula Harbor Project is not normally maintained, as it is a naturally deep river channel. However, concerns were raised from local industry that a bend in the Escatawpa River channel had become too shallow to navigate safely. Hydrographic surveys conducted by USACE over the years and most recently in the spring of 2019 confirmed that a small portion of the channel was no longer navigable and therefore, maintenance dredging would be needed to bring the channel to authorized depths. Also, the only approved placement area(s) for this section of channel are upland sites located further down the river towards the Pascagoula River. Due to the significant distance to the nearest site(s) and subsequent increased project costs, the in-channel placement method was more cost efficient than placing at an upland site.

The proposed action involves maintenance dredging and in-channel placement activities associated with the federally authorized Pascagoula Harbor (Escatawpa River portion) navigation project (Figure 1). An additional -2 feet of advanced maintenance plus -2 feet of overdepth dredging will be added to each project section. Maintenance dredging of soft-dredged material with hopper, mechanical, and/or hydraulic cutterhead dredges tends to disturb the bottom sediments several feet deeper than the target depth due to the inaccuracies of the dredging process. An additional -3 feet of sediment below the -2-foot paid allowable dredging cut may be disturbed in the dredging process with minor amounts of the material being removed. The area proposed for dredging ranges from -6 feet to -11 feet Mean Lower Low Water (MLLW). The authorized depth is -12 feet MLLW (plus -2 feet of advanced maintenance, plus -2 feet of overdepth dredging and plus -3 feet for sediment disturbance). The dredged material from the maintenance dredging will be placed within deeper areas of the existing federally-authorized channel. The portion of the channel proposed for in-channel placement is approximately 20 acres in size, depth ranges from -20 to -39 feet MLLW and is less than 1 mile from the dredging area. The amount of dredged material to be removed is estimated to be approximately 20,000 cubic yards for this dredging event. This action could be accomplished by a mechanical, hopper and/or hydraulic cutterhead dredge.

WATER QUALITY CERTIFICATION: Pursuant to the Clean Water Act, a state water quality certification is required for the proposed action. Water quality certification for the proposed activities associated with the Escatawpa River portion of the Pascagoula Harbor navigation project is being requested from the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), Office of Pollution Control (OPC) for a ten-year period. A decision relative to water quality certification will be determined by MDEQ-OPC upon completion of the comment period. A Section 404(b)(1) evaluation report has been prepared and is included in the APPENDIX of the Environmental Assessment (EA). All State water quality standards will be met.

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

USE BY OTHERS: Portions of the proposed project area are located within an industrialized area. The proposed action for the Pascagoula Harbor navigation project is not expected to cause any significant land use changes in the adjacent areas. Use of waters in the vicinity of the channel include fishing and recreational boating.

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 July 12, 1985. USACE, Director of Civil Works, signed the Record of Decision (ROD) for Pascagoula Harbor channel improvements on July 24, 1992. In

addition, the Regional Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Region 4 signed a ROD for the ODMDS designation on June 28, 1991. Separate Environmental Assessments (EAs) and Section 404(b)(1) Evaluations were prepared for: the shallow draft (River) and deep draft (Harbor) portions to address impacts associated with maintenance activities. After Hurricane Katrina, Congress passed Public Law 109-148, dated December 2005, which authorized Flood Control and Coastal Emergency (FCCE) funds to be used to complete previously unconstructed portions of authorized projects in the State of Mississippi along the Mississippi Gulf Coast at full Federal expense. A Final Supplemental EIS (FSEIS) was prepared in 2010 to address potential impacts associated with the construction of all authorized improvements to Pascagoula Harbor. The ROD for the FSEIS was signed on August 19, 2011.

In accordance with the requirements of NEPA, an EA entitled "Environmental Assessment and Section 404(b)(1) Evaluation Report for Maintenance Dredging and In-Channel Placement for the Escatawpa River, Pascagoula Harbor Federal Navigation Channel Project", evaluating impacts associated with the proposed action has been prepared and is available at: https://www.sam.usace.army.mil/Missions/Planning-Environmental/ Environmental-Assessments/. Based on the conclusion presented in the EA, it is determined that the implementation of the proposed action would not result in long-term adverse impacts and that no significant cumulative impacts would occur. The Final EA will be updated depending on comments received and need. Upon finalization of the EA, a Finding of No Significant Impacts (FONSI) will be prepared.

SECTION 404(b)(1) EVALUATION: A draft Section 404(b)1 Evaluation Report has been prepared to evaluate impacts associated with the proposed action in accordance with guidelines promulgated by the EPA under Section 404(b)(1) of the Clean Water Act. Impacts associated with this action include a temporary increase in turbidity and suspended solids concentrations in and adjacent to the dredging and placement areas, short-term loss of benthic organisms and localized short-term degradation of aesthetics near the placement area. The draft Section 404(b)(1) Evaluation Report is available at: https://www.sam.usace.army.mil/ Missions/ Planning-Environmental/ Environmental-Assessments/.

ENDANGERED AND THREATENED SPECIES: Pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, operations and maintenance (O&M) dredging and placement of material action(s) at Pascagoula Harbor were previously coordinated with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). During past certification efforts for O&M actions, concurrences were received from these agencies. Based on review of endangered and threatened species that could occur within the project area, USACE, Mobile District has determined that the proposed action *may affect but is not likely to adversely affect* the Yellow-blotched map turtle, Alabama red-bellied turtle, Gulf sturgeon, Pearl darter, and West Indian manatee. The project area is outside of Gulf Sturgeon Critical Habitat.

ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT (EFH): The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA) defines "EFH" as "those waters and substrate necessary to fish for 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. See the draft EA for species specific to the Escatawpa River. 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 and the recovery time for benthic(s) is short-term. As a result of the project, temporary and localized increases in the turbidity may occur during dredged material placement. The spatial extent of elevated turbidity is expected to be within 400 feet of the operation, with turbidity levels returning to ambient conditions within a few hours after completion of placement activities. The proposed action is not anticipated to adversely alter the present EFH. Compliance with EFH procedures is being initiated through publication of this public notice.

CULTURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS: In compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and other authorities, the Mississippi Department of Archives and History and appropriate Tribal Nations are being consulted concerning this project's effects to historic properties. No known historic properties are present in the Area of Potential Effects (APE) and previous studies have identified the APE has having low probability for the presence of historic properties. USACE has determined that based on the nature of the undertaking and surveys demonstrating that the dredged material has shoaled in within the past 20 years, the undertaking coordinated by this document will have No Effects to historic properties. The Mississippi State Historic Preservation Officer and Federally Recognized Tribes with an interest in the area are being consulted regarding USACE's effects determination.

AIR QUALITY: The Clean Air Act of 1970, as amended in 1990, mandated that the EPA establish ambient standards for certain pollutants, regarding all identifiable effects a pollutant may have on the public health and welfare. The EPA subsequently developed the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) identifying levels of air quality for six criteria pollutants, which it assessed to be necessary to protect public health and welfare. Air quality would be temporarily and insignificantly affected due to emissions resulting from dredge operations and other necessary equipment. Jackson County is in attainment with the NAAQS of the Clean Air Act.

EVALUATION: The decision whether to proceed with the proposed action will be based on an evaluation of the overall public interest. That decision would reflect the national concerns for both protection and utilization of important resources. The benefits that may be reasonably expected to accrue from the proposal must be balanced against its reasonably foreseeable detriments. The decision whether to proceed and the conditions under which the activity would occur would be determined by the outcome of this general balancing process. All factors which may be relevant to the proposal will be considered including the cumulative effects thereof; among those are conservation, economics, aesthetics, general environmental concerns, wetlands, historic properties, fish and wildlife values, navigation, recreation, water supply and conservation, water quality, safety and in general the needs and welfare of the people. The proposed action would proceed unless it is found to be contrary to the overall public interest. Inasmuch as the proposed work would involve the discharge of materials into navigable waters, specification of the proposed disposal sites associated with this Federal

project is being made through the application of guidelines promulgated by the Administrator of the EPA in conjunction with the Secretary of the Army. If these guidelines alone prohibit the specification of any proposed disposal site, any potential impairment of the maintenance of navigation including any economic impacts on navigation and anchorage, which would result from the failure to use this site, would also be considered.

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

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 4
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Jackson, Mississippi
U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service, Habitat Conservation Division
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service, Protected Species Division
Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, Office of Pollution Control
Mississippi Department of Marine Resources
Mississippi 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 Interests in the Project Area

Other Federal, State and local organizations, United States Senators and Representatives of Mississippi are being sent copies of this notice and are requested to participate in coordinating review of this proposed action. 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. FP19-PA01-09 and should be addressed to the Commander, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District, Attention: CESAM-PD-EC, Post Office Box 2288, Mobile, Alabama 36628-0001. For additional information please contact Ms. Caree Kovacevich via email at caree.a.kovacevich@usace.army.mil or at (251) 690-3026.

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

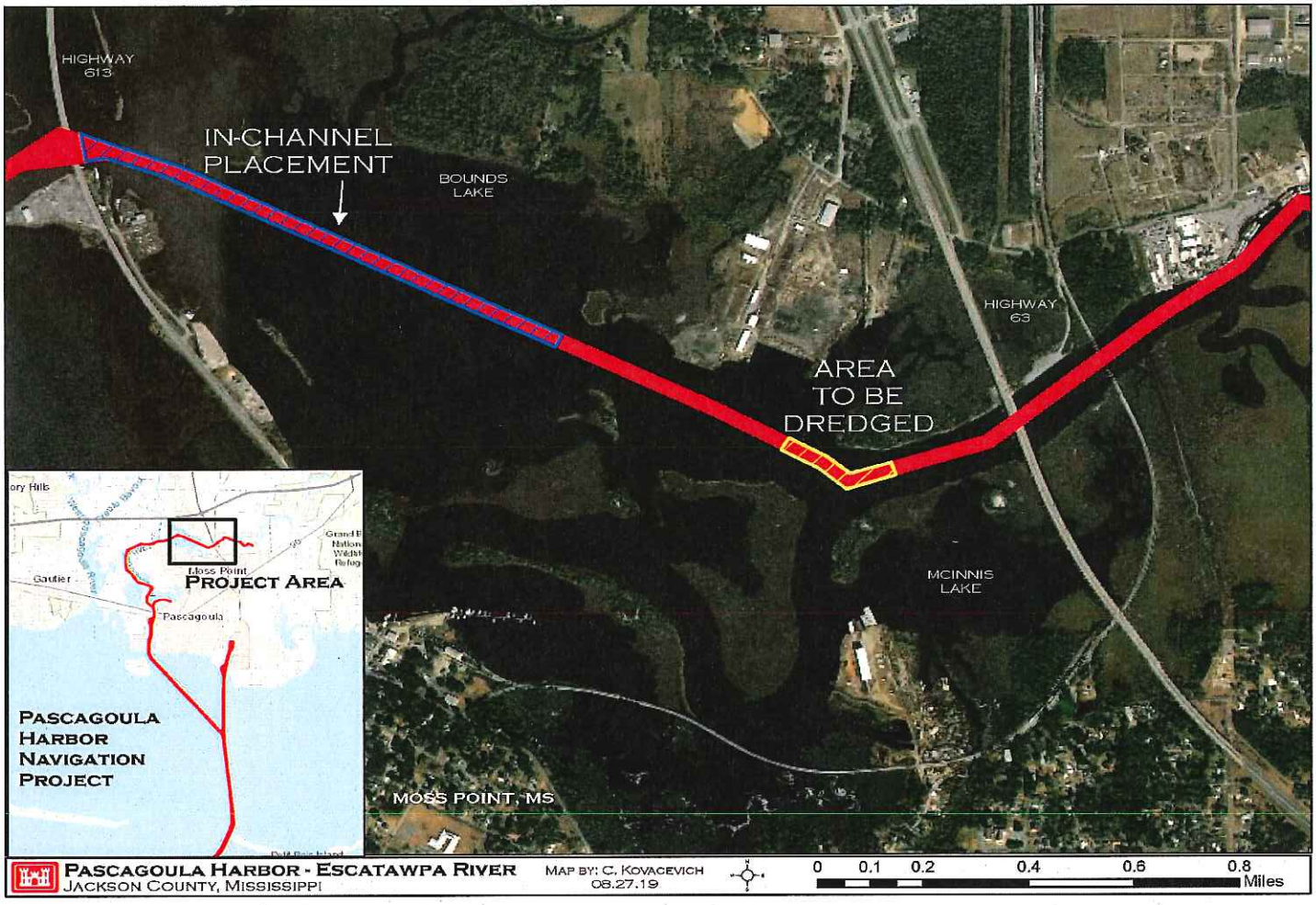

Figure 1: Pascagoula Harbor Federal Navigation Channel Project (Escatawpa River portion) and proposed maintenance dredging and in-channel placement