



This is the first in a series of newsletters to keep you informed of the progress of a study of the feasibility of deepening and widening the Mobile Harbor Federal Navigation Channel.

Spring 2017 Issue 01

Newsletter

A Word from the Commander



Col. James Delapp

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Mobile District is making great progress on the study to develop the Mobile Harbor General Reevaluation Report (GRR). We've been working on this comprehensive study now for more than 18 months. The study, which is cost-shared with the project's local sponsor, the Alabama State Port Authority, is estimated to be a four-year, \$7.8 million effort.

In order to share the progress of the ongoing study with the public, the District staff publishes a

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INTEGRATED GENERAL REEVALUATION REPORT WITH SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The navigation channel dredging in Mobile Bay and Mobile River began in 1826 with the enactment of the River and Harbor Act of 1826.

Since that time, there have been various modifications, to where currently, the majority of the channel is 45 feet deep and 400 feet wide. The 1986 Water Resources Development Act authorized the majority of the channel to be 55 feet deep and 550 feet wide. That authorization was based on a report that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), developed in 1981.

In 2014, the Alabama State Port Authority submitted a request to the

USACE, Mobile District to consider increasing the depth and width of the Mobile Harbor Channel to dimensions authorized in 1986, to improve vessel safety and efficiency within the harbor. In response to that request, USACE initiated a general reevaluation study to determine if modifications to the channel can be recommended at this time. The results of the

reevaluation study will be presented in an Integrated General Reevaluation Report with Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. For brevity, the study and the resulting report are referred to as the Mobile Harbor GRR.

“ We are currently in the study phase of the proposed Mobile Harbor project. It is anticipated that the GRR and SEIS will be complete by the end of 2019.”
- Col. James Delapp



The proposed widening and/or deepening of the harbor would improve safety and efficiency within the harbor.

The Planning Process

For water resource studies, including those that result in a General Reevaluation Report, the USACE uses an iterative six-step planning process.

Those steps are:

Step 1 - Identify problems and opportunities

Step 2 - Inventory and forecast conditions

Step 3 - Formulate alternative plans

Step 4 - Evaluate alternative plans

Step 5 - Compare alternative plans

Step 6 - Select a plan

For this analysis, we have identified three problems specific to the requested navigation improvements:

As noted earlier, the study

- Larger-size vessels experience transit delays due to existing width of channel.
- Existing channel depths limit vessel-cargo capacity.
- Existing traffic congestion has increased safety concerns.

includes a significant amount of information gathering, data collection and modeling to help better understand the potential costs, benefits and environmental impacts of any proposed action. A number of models have been identified for use in this study to forecast future conditions and assist in the evaluation and comparison of alternatives. These models will be used for economic projections and assessment, engineering design and assessment, and environmental characterization and impact assessment.

What is a GRR?

A General Reevaluation Report (GRR) documents and presents the results of investigations and analyses conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to reanalyze a previously completed study using current planning criteria and policies. The reanalysis is required when there are changed conditions or assumptions, or a significant passage of time. The results of the study can confirm the original recommendation, modify it as appropriate, or find that no plan is currently justified.

For Mobile Harbor, the USACE is determining what channel improvements can be implemented within the limits of the current authorization. The study process is thorough, incorporating engineering economic, and

environmental analyses. The study includes a significant amount of information gathering, data collection and modeling to help better understand the potential costs, benefits and environmental impacts of any proposed action. The study process also includes public, technical, policy, legal and independent external peer reviews.

Data developed during the study will enable the USACE in its planning process to develop an array of alternatives, evaluate and compare the alternatives, narrow the alternatives to a tentatively selected plan (TSP), which, after further refinement and review, may become the recommended plan or action. The TSP is scheduled for public review in the summer of 2018.

What is an SEIS?

Federal agencies are required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to consider the environmental effects of their actions as part of their decision-making process. The information generated must be documented and coordinated with agencies and the public as defined by NEPA. If the environmental impacts are considered to be significant, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is prepared.

The previous study of Mobile Harbor, completed in 1981, included the preparation of an EIS with the findings documented in a Record of Decision. A Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) is being prepared for

this study to review and update the findings of the existing EIS and will consider additional environmental impacts based on the introduction of improvement options and major changes in the natural environment or communities. The SEIS will be included within the General Reevaluation Report as an integrated document.

The SEIS will define the baseline conditions of Mobile Harbor and its vicinity and document the evaluation of the potential environmental effects of the proposed actions and alternatives on the existing environment. The SEIS will include multiple alternatives including the "No Action"



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Community Outreach

Public involvement is a vital part of the process of developing the General Reevaluation Report (GRR). It provides an opportunity for the general public and interested stakeholders to learn about and comment on the proposed project and its alternatives.

Public involvement tools and activities for the Mobile Harbor GRR include focus-group meetings, agency briefings, public meetings, a project website, listserve, social media, news media releases and quarterly bulletins. All interested

persons and organizations are encouraged to participate. A public scoping meeting was held in Mobile in January 2016, at the initiation of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) as required by NEPA. Once the Draft SEIS is completed, the team will host a public meeting to discuss the findings. The meeting is tentatively scheduled for the summer of 2018.

An open house was held in March 2017, in Daphne, Ala. Members of the project team were

on hand with graphical displays to explain the various ongoing work the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District is conducting and answering questions related to study. As the study progresses, additional meetings will be held at various locations in an effort to give all stakeholders an opportunity to attend. As noted by Col. DeLapp, the next meeting has been scheduled for September 2017. Specific date and location will be announced on the District's webpage and in public notices.

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What is an SEIS?

alternative, which examines the effects of maintaining the current conditions into the future. The SEIS will identify potential consequences and the appropriate mitigation, if needed, to minimize adverse impacts.

Public involvement is a vital part of the process of preparing an SEIS. It provides an opportunity for the general public and interested stakeholders to learn about and comment on the proposed project and its alternatives. Public comments received will be documented in the administrative record and will be considered during the study and decision-making process.

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A Word from the Commander

bi-weekly project update on the Mobile District's website. We are also publishing this quarterly newsletter and hosting public meetings. On March 16, we held our second public engagement, an open house in Daphne. The open house was an opportunity to show the public the progress of the economic, engineering and environmental studies that are currently underway. It was also yet another opportunity for members of the public to ask questions and provide feedback.

As the study progresses, we will hold additional public engagements. The next one is scheduled for September.

We will choose a different venue for each meeting in order to give everyone who is interested in the project the opportunity to attend, learn more about the process, ask questions and provide feedback.

If you're interested in the Mobile Harbor GRR, I encourage you to visit the GRR section on the Mobile District webpage where you can subscribe to our listserve. You can also keep current on the GRR by following the Mobile District on Facebook and/or Twitter.



Critical Issues

Considering the size of the bay, the length of the channel, and the possible magnitude of material that could be removed and disposed, a number of critical issues must be considered:

1. Impacts on coastal and sediment transport processes
2. Shoreline erosion
3. Environmental impacts to:
 - a. Species
 - b. Submerged aquatic vegetation
 - c. Essential fish habitat
 - d. Existing natural resources (oysters, marshes, wetland and bay bottoms)
 - e. Water quality
 - f. Cultural resources
4. Shoreline erosion
5. Disposal location
6. Disposal capacity

Assessing these issues and analyzing the potential impacts and defining alternatives or means to mitigate those impacts requires a substantial effort. The results of this study effort and how these critical issues are addressed will be contained in the Integrated General Reevaluation Report with Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS).

Assessing critical issues, analyzing the potential impacts and defining alternatives or means to mitigate those impacts requires a substantial effort.



Environmental staff conduct extensive habitat impact assessments for the GRR study.

How to Get Involved



Public comments on the study will be added to the official record for the project. All comments will be addressed at the appropriate time during the study. Both written and verbal comments may be received at public meetings by visiting the Public Comment area. Public comments can be made at any time during the preparation of the SEIS. Alternate methods to submit



Send an email to: MobileHarborGRR@usace.army.mil



Mail a letter to: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Attn: PD-F, P.O. Box 2288 Mobile AL 36628

Stay Informed!



Biweekly updates and project documents on the project website:
<http://www.sam.usace.army.mil/>



Sign up for the listserv on the project website to receive a copy of the quarterly bulletin.

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