

## RECORD OF DECISION

### Sabine-Neches Waterway Channel Improvement Project Southeast Texas and Southwest Louisiana

The Final Feasibility Report (FR) and the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), dated March 2011, and the report of the Chief of Engineers, dated July 22, 2011, for the Sabine-Neches Waterway (SNWW) address navigation improvement opportunities along the Texas and Louisiana border. Based on these reports, the reviews of other Federal, State, and local agencies, input from the public, and the review by my staff, I find the plan recommended by the Chief of Engineers to be technically feasible, economically justified, environmentally acceptable, and in the public interest. Thus, I approve the SNWW Channel Improvement Project for construction.

The FR/FEIS documents the evaluation of both structural and non-structural alternatives to address the navigational improvement needs of the SNWW. The recommended plan is the Locally Preferred Plan (LPP) which consists of the following modifications to the existing SNWW:

- Deepening the SNWW from the Port of Beaumont Turning Basin through the Sabine Pass Jetty Channel from -40 to -48 feet and the offshore Outer Bar and Sabine Bank Channels from -42 to -50 feet;
- Extending the -50 foot deep offshore channel by 13.2 miles, increasing the total length of the channel from 64 to 77 miles;
- Decreasing the width of the Sabine Bank Channel from 800 to 700 feet;
- Tapering and marking the Sabine Bank Channel from 800 feet wide (Station 23+300) to 700 feet wide (Station 25+800);
- Deepening to -48 feet of Taylor Bayou channels and turning basins and associated various widenings of these same areas;
- Widening selected bends on the Sabine-Neches Canal and Neches River Channel;
- Constructing new turning and anchorage basins, and enlarging/deepening existing turning and anchorage basins on the Neches River Channel to -48 feet; and
- Constructing habitat features as part of the least cost disposal method for the SNWW Dredged Material Management Plan (DMMP):
  - The Neches River habitat features (Rose City East, Bessie Heights East, and Old River Cove) would restore approximately 2,853 acres of emergent marsh, improve 871 acres of open water habitat, and nourish 1,234 acres of existing marsh.
  - The Gulf Shore habitat feature would periodically nourish three miles of shoreline in Texas and three miles of shoreline in Louisiana.
- Compensatory mitigation consisting of:
  - Restoring 2,783 acres of emergent marsh, improving 957 acres of shallow water habitat, and stabilizing and nourishing 4,355 acres of existing marsh in the Willow and Black Bayou areas of Louisiana. These actions would provide 1,181 Average Annual Habitat Units (AAHUs) to compensate for a loss of 1,159 AAHUs.

*Encl 1*

- Monitoring performance of habitat features and mitigation measures, with an adaptive management plan for corrective action, if needed.

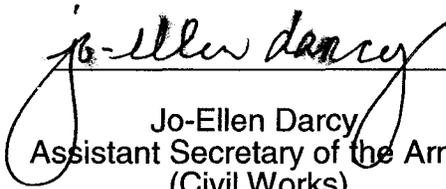
In addition to the no action plan, over 120 structural combinations of depths and widths and three non-structural alternatives for navigation improvements were evaluated as described in the FR/FEIS. Nonstructural alternatives considered were offshore oil terminals, a vessel traffic management system, and modification of pilot rules. The no action plan and six deepening alternatives (-45, -46, -47, -48, -49, and -50 feet) were advanced for final evaluation and are fully described and evaluated in the FR/FEIS, which is incorporated herein by reference. The -49 foot depth was identified as the national economic development plan. The recommended plan is the -48 foot plan, which is also the environmentally preferable alternative and the plan preferred by the local sponsor.

All practicable means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental effects have been incorporated into the recommended plan, and the compensatory mitigation plan would address all unavoidable impacts. Primary impacts would be a reduction in the biological productivity of intertidal marsh and the loss of marsh acreage in Louisiana due to increased salinities. All adverse impacts in Texas and some in Louisiana would be offset by the environmental benefits of the DMMP habitat features. The compensatory mitigation would address the remaining adverse impacts in Louisiana.

Technical and economic criteria used in the formulation of alternative plans were those specified in the Water Resource Council's Economic and Environmental Principles and Guidelines for Water and Related Land Resources Implementation Studies. All applicable laws, executive orders, regulations and guidelines were considered in the evaluation of alternatives and the selection of the recommended plan. The Louisiana Office of Coastal Management found the recommended plan to be conditionally consistent with Louisiana's Coastal Resource Program, per Section 307 of the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers does not concur with the State of Louisiana's conditional consistency determination, and has determined that the recommended plan is fully consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the state's Coastal Resource Program. Water Quality Certifications under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act have been received from both the States of Louisiana and Texas. Based on review of these evaluations, I find that the public interest would best be served by implementing the recommended plan. This Record of Decision completes the National Environmental Policy Act process.

FEB 14 2012

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jo-Ellen Darcy  
Assistant Secretary of the Army  
(Civil Works)