



**US Army Corps
of Engineers**
Baltimore District

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

MAINTENANCE DREDGING

WICOMICO RIVER FEDERAL NAVIGATION CHANNEL PROJECT

WICOMICO AND SOMERSET COUNTIES, MARYLAND

September 2022

Prepared by:

**U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District
2 Hopkins Plaza
Baltimore, Maryland 21201**



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
BALTIMORE DISTRICT, U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS
2 HOPKINS PLAZA
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI) MAINTENANCE DREDGING
WICOMICO RIVER
FEDERAL NAVIGATION CHANNEL PROJECT, WICOMICO AND SOMERSET
COUNTIES, MARYLAND

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District (USACE) is proposing to conduct maintenance dredging of the Wicomico River Federal Navigation Channel Project and make beneficial use of the dredged material to restore tidal wetlands at Deal Island Wildlife Management Area (WMA). In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, USACE has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) evaluating environmental and social effects of the proposed action. The navigation project provides for a 37-mile-long channel in the Wicomico River 150 feet wide and 14 feet deep, plus two feet of allowable overdepth, from the Chesapeake Bay to Salisbury, Maryland. Wicomico County is the non-Federal sponsor. The port of Salisbury has the second highest commercial port traffic in Maryland, principally consisting of petroleum products and grain.

The proposed action evaluated in this EA would hydraulically dredge approximately 7 miles of the Wicomico River navigation channel in its lower reaches from Monie Bay upstream to about Mount Vernon Wharf to reestablish authorized depths. Approximately 140,000 cubic yards of mixed mud and sand would be hydraulically dredged and pumped through a pipeline to the placement site in Deal Island WMA. From the dredge vessel, the pipeline would temporarily lay in the Wicomico River from the dredge to Dames Quarter Creek. A permanent conduit would be constructed utilizing directional drilling under Route 363 (Deal Island Road) near the community of Dames Quarter. A temporary pipeline would then go overland approximately 4 miles to the southern end of Deal Island WMA. A containment area would be created using straw bales and tidal ditch plugs in failing tidal wetlands south of the WMA waterfowl impoundment on the north side of Manokin Creek shoreline. The north side of the containment area would be the southern berm of the WMA waterfowl impoundment. The temporary pipeline would be placed on the waterfowl impoundment berm outside the placement area and the material would be placed into the containment area. The outfall pipe would be moved as needed to achieve the desired tidal wetlands elevations. Some supplies and equipment would be transported to the placement site via boat/shallow barge across Manokin Creek. Approximately 75 acres of tidal wetland would be restored. Dredging and placement would take approximately 4 months. Native vegetation would be planted and seeded to restore tidal wetland vegetation. Seeding and planting duration efforts would take approximately two years.

Potential impacts were assessed regarding physical, chemical and biological characteristics of the aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, threatened and endangered species, cultural resources, and the general needs and welfare of the public. Several sensitive environmental resources would be

impacted and require consideration. Many of these resources have been evaluated during planning of the proposed action and previous operations and maintenance dredging, and USACE has included time-of-year (TOY) restrictions and other best management practices (BMPs) to protect water quality, submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV), oyster resources, waterfowl, and habitat as conditions of authorizations (permits) and resource agency review recommendations.

Dredging would be expected to have short-term minor adverse impacts to water quality, benthic organisms, and essential fish habitat (EFH) associated with increased turbidity and physical removal of bottom material. It is anticipated that benthic life and EFH in the Wicomico River would recover to pre-dredging conditions within approximately two years. Dredging would occur within MD-designated natural oyster bar (NOB) 29-1 but would be conducted in accordance with time-of-year restrictions and other BMP requirements of MD Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) and MD Department of the Environment (MDE) to minimize impacts. Portions of the Wicomico River plus Deal Island WMA (including the proposed placement site) are located within MD-designated Waterfowl Concentration Areas. USACE would conduct the proposed work in accordance with TOY restrictions and other BMPs required to minimize impacts to waterfowl.

The temporary pipeline in the Wicomico River may cross or lie in close proximity to the MD-designated Webster Oyster Sanctuary and leased aquaculture sites. USACE anticipates coordinating with MDNR to identify appropriate BMPs to minimize impacts to oyster resources. Coordination would also be undertaken with leaseholders if it becomes necessary. The temporary pipeline in the Wicomico River may need to cross Unit 15 (Long Point) of the Coastal Barrier Resources System (CBRS) at Dames Quarter Creek. The temporary pipeline on land may possibly cross CBRS Unit 14 (Franks Island) adjacent to Deal Island WMA. It is anticipated that the US Fish and Wildlife Service will coordinate with USACE regarding whether there are any implications for temporary pipeline location or BMPs that could be required.

The temporary pipeline on land would need to cross tidal wetlands at Dames Quarter Creek, Route 363 vicinity, and within Deal Island WMA. This would temporarily adversely impact approximately 0.8 acres of tidal wetlands. Approximately 0.05 acres of permanent impacts to tidal wetlands (loss) would occur at the conduit ends at Route 363. At the placement site, the project would fill approximately 75 acres of failing tidal wetlands and associated recently formed open water habitat to restore tidal wetlands. Following temporary pipeline removal, disturbed tidal wetlands vegetation and soils along the pipeline route would be restored to pre-project conditions. Placement at Deal Island WMA would utilize BMPs to minimize impacts to SAV habitat and the Manokin Oyster Sanctuary in Manokin Creek. The proposed action would cause other minor short-term and local adverse impacts. Fish and wildlife may temporarily relocate elsewhere during dredging and construction. The dredge, pipeline, and construction equipment would emit air pollutants, create noise, and potentially disrupt navigation in the river and traffic on land along the pipeline route. The dredge and pipeline would be marked and positioned to minimize impacts to navigation and traffic.

The proposed beneficial use of dredged material would restore approximately 75 acres of tidal wetlands, and is designed to provide nesting habitat for saltmarsh sparrow, a rapidly declining species. The proposed project would indirectly protect the WMA impoundment, which is managed to provide food for waterfowl and waterbirds, from erosion. USACE and project partners will

perform pre and post placement measurements of the placement site and restored tidal wetlands to monitor success of the site.

USACE issued a notice of availability of the draft EA and FONSI for public and agency review. USACE incorporated revisions into the final EA and FONSI to respond to comments submitted during the public review period. USACE received a provisional water quality certification (WQC) from MDE for the proposed action dated July 27, 2022. USACE received a revised (and final) WQC from MDE on August 19, 2022. The revised WQC added Wicomico County (non-federal sponsor) as second certification holder, responsible for certain special conditions. All work would be conducted in accordance with the WQC.

Upon reviewing the EA, I find that potential negative environmental and social impacts associated with implementation of the proposed project will not be significant. Adverse impacts will be primarily short-term in nature. The project would restore failing tidal wetlands with material that needs to be dredged to maintain channel navigability. This is an optimal means to obtain material to restore tidal wetlands and is inherently mitigational for other short-term adverse impacts described above. Based upon this finding, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. USACE would continue to maintain the Wicomico River navigation channel cost effectively and with appropriate environmental mitigation measures.

Date

PINCHASIN.ESTHER.
SARAH.1020943676

Digitally signed by
PINCHASIN.ESTHER.SARAH.10209
43676
Date: 2022.09.21 15:50:57 -0400

Estee S. Pinchasin
Colonel, U.S. Army
Commander and District Engineer