RHODES POINT NAVIGATION IMPROVEMENT PROJECT
SOMERSET COUNTY, MARYLAND
DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District, has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) to evaluate and document the potential environmental effects associated with the proposed navigation channel improvements at Rhodes Point on Smith Island, Somerset County, Maryland, being pursued under the authority of the Continuing Authorities Program, Section 107.

The Proposed Action is to implement a small navigation project, which includes realignment of the navigation channel, construction of jetties, and a stone sill. The dredged material and other suitable excavated material will be beneficially used for restoration, enhancement and protection of the wetland located south of the Sheep Pen Gut federal channel. The proposed project would realign a portion of the authorized dimensions of the federal navigation channel at Smith Island in Sheep Pen Gut. The channel would be hydraulically dredged to extend to the -6-foot mean lower low water (MLLW) contour (plus an additional 1 foot allowed for overdredging). Following realignment, the federal channel will be 1,900 feet long in total, extending from within the mouth of Sheep Pen gut into the Chesapeake Bay. The realigned channel, extending 1,750 feet from the mouth of Sheep Pen Gut, will be 50 feet wide. The last 150 feet into the Bay will be 100 feet wide. This realignment of the channel provides more direct access to the Bay. The alignment extends the existing authorized channel by approximately 425 feet northwestward but it removes the need to dredge and maintain the portion of the navigation channel that runs in a southwest direction.

The construction of two jetties (which involves hydraulic dredging of bay bottom and placement of stone) is proposed to reduce shoaling of the realigned and dredged channel. The jetty to the north of the navigation channel would be approximately 650 feet long by 50 feet wide at its base and 6 feet wide at its crest with a footprint of 0.75 acre and aligned from deep water to the existing shoreline in a northeasterly direction. The jetty south of the navigation channel would be approximately 1,150 feet long by 50 feet wide at its base and 6 feet wide at its crest, with a footprint of approximately 1.3 acres in open (shallow to deep) water and aligned in an east-west direction parallel to the federal channel. Both jetties will be built to a crest elevation of +5 feet MLLW. It is anticipated that there will be minor, localized permanent impacts to water depths and circulation, sediment, aesthetics (viewshed), and benthos due to the permanent placement of jetty structures. The construction of a stone sill along the eroding shoreline will contain the material dredged from the channel and the material excavated from the jetty foundation.

Dredged material from the channel, jetty, and sill footprints is estimated to be 24,000 cubic yards (cy). This material will be used beneficially to restore, enhance, and protect wetlands behind the stone sill and to reinforce the tie-in point around the north jetty-tie in. The material will be planted with native plant species restoring approximately 2.5 acres of wetlands and enhancing approximately 2.5 acres of wetlands. The dredged material will be placed hydraulically. The stone sill will be approximately 850 feet long, 5 feet wide at the crest, 30 feet wide at the base, with an approximate footprint of 0.6 acre in open (shallow) water. The sill will be built to a crest elevation of +3 feet MLLW. It is anticipated that there will be minor, localized permanent impacts to water depths and circulation, sediment, aesthetics (viewshed), benthos, due to the permanent placement of the stone sill structures. This sill will provide stabilization for beneficially used dredged material along approximately 850 feet of eroding shoreline and will protect approximately 15 acres of wetlands. The stone sill will have a series of low notches (openings) for shallow water habitat interaction with the shoreline.

The purpose of the action is to provide navigation improvements to the federally maintained channel at Sheep Pen Gut. Although the primary purpose of the project is satisfied by the construction of the jetties and realignment of the navigation channel, secondary benefits will accrue from the beneficial use of the dredged material to stabilize the eroding shoreline along the western shore of Smith Island south of the Sheep Pen Gut Channel. This allows for restoration and protection of wetlands in this area.

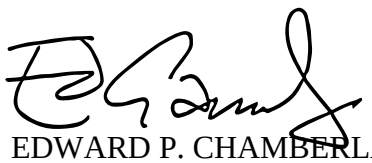
The project is expected to have these benefits: improve navigable access to Chesapeake Bay from the Smith Island towns of Rhodes Point and Tylerton and protect the Sheep Pen Gut channel from shoaling. Secondary benefits result from the beneficial use of the dredged material to restore and enhance the eroded wetland along the western shoreline of Smith Island south of the Sheep Pen Gut Channel.

Potential impacts from the Proposed Action are described and evaluated in the Rhodes Point EA. These were assessed with regard to the physical, chemical, and biological characteristics of the aquatic and terrestrial ecosystem, endangered and threatened species, hazardous and toxic materials, aesthetics and recreation, cultural resources, and the general needs and welfare of the public. The navigation channel, jetties, stone sill, and beneficial use placement site are permanent features. The potential impacts to the environment associated with implementation of this navigation improvement project will occur over a relatively small area (approximately 5 acres of open water). It is anticipated that there will be minor, localized permanent impacts to water depths and circulation, sediment, aesthetics (viewshed), and benthos, due to the permanent placement of the structures. However, these impacts are small and considered minor within the study area. The affected resources impacted by these structures are expected to recover in the area.

Additionally, minor temporary impacts are expected to be associated with the construction of the project and its future maintenance. It is anticipated that there will be minor, temporary impacts to sediments and soils, water depths and water circulation, water quality, noise, air quality, plankton, shellfish, benthos, mammals, birds, fish, vegetation (wetlands), reptiles, aesthetics (viewshed), navigation and recreation.

The project will produce a net beneficial impact to the environment through the beneficial use of the dredged material by restoring the eroding western shoreline of Smith Island and the stabilization of the wetlands landward of the shoreline. The restoration of this wetland area and stabilization is beneficial to the protection of the larger wetland system, the value and function of the wetlands, and the resources in the waterway including benthos, mammals, birds, fish and vegetative resources. The construction of the jetties is anticipated to have long-term beneficial impacts to the local economy, navigation, recreational boaters, and safety due to these structures reducing the erosion of the federal navigation channel.

Upon reviewing the EA, I find that there would be no significant impacts to the resources considered and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required for the Proposed Actions.



EDWARD P. CHAMBERLAYNE, P.E.
Colonel, U.S. Army
Commander and District Engineer

Date: 15 September 2017