



US Army Corps
of Engineers®

Seattle District

Notice of Preparation

Navigation Section
P.O. Box 3755
Seattle, WA 98124-3755
ATTN: Hiram Arden (OD-TS-NS)

Notice Date: March 1, 2006
Expiration Date: March 16, 2006
Reference: CENWS OD-TS-NS-25
Name: Grays Harbor Crab Mitigation Program

Interested parties are hereby notified that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Seattle District (Corps) plans to prepare, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, an environmental assessment (EA) for a proposed experimental oyster spat placement as part of the Grays Harbor Dungeness crab (*Cancer magister*) mitigation strategy. Dungeness crabs are adversely impacted entrainment during routine maintenance dredging. Entrainment occurs when aquatic organisms are trapped in the uptake of sediments and water being removed by the dredging equipment. The crab mitigation program provides compensatory rearing habitat for Dungeness crabs through the regular placement of oyster shell on mudflats in Grays Harbor. The purpose of this Notice is to solicit information on the environmental impacts of the proposed experimental oyster spat placement.

Dungeness crab mitigation actions (i.e. oyster shell placement) and the associated environmental conditions and consequences were previously evaluated in the 1989 Final Environmental Impact Statement Supplement (EISS) for the Grays Harbor Navigation Improvement Project. In addition, in 1998, a Revised Crab Mitigation Strategy Agreement was negotiated and finalized with participants from numerous agencies. Information contained within those documents will be incorporated by reference in the environmental assessment (EA) for the proposed spat placement.

AUTHORITY

The original Grays Harbor navigation channel was authorized by Congress in the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1896. The Grays Harbor and Chehalis River Project and regular Department of the Army maintenance dredging were authorized by the Rivers and Harbor Act of 1935, and modified in 1945 and 1954. In 1990, the navigation channel was widened and deepened as part of the Grays Harbor Navigation Improvement Project, which was authorized by the Water Resources Development Act of 1986.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Corps proposes to plant live Pacific oyster spat on five to six 20x20 meter plots, covering approximately 2000-2800 square meters of ground. 200-250 bags of shell containing live oyster spat with a total volume of 65-80 cubic meters will be obtained from a licensed supplier and placed on the new 2006 shell placement areas at a density of approximately 24 shells per meter squared.

Spat will be spread at approximately 40 bags per plot which is less than the commercial operations place. The empty shells, with overwintered oyster spat on them at the density of about 20 spat per shell, will be placed evenly about the 20 x 20 subplot during the last tide in March, 2006. Beginning in May, the young oysters will be measured each month during the four month field season that the shell mitigation plots are surveyed for shell cover estimates. Quality of habitat will be measured by crab density per meter squared, and longevity will be measured as percent shell cover over time relative to existing plots of the same age without live oysters.

Ongoing monitoring of the spat placement plots will occur for about three years to determine project success. If the project meets expectations and crab habitat quality and longevity are greatly enhanced by the spat placement, we foresee a discussion in the future regarding incorporating the planting of live oysters into the standard crab mitigation protocol.

ANTICIPATED IMPACTS

No adverse impacts to water quality as a result of the shell placement are expected. Spat placement will occur in the dry at low tide on established shell plots.

No alterations to bottom bathymetry beyond those described in the EISS and crab mitigation strategy are expected. Spat placement will occur in areas in which the Corps currently conducts shell placement activities, so no new impacts are anticipated.

No impacts to flora and fauna are expected as a result of the experimental spat placement. Pacific oysters are widely cultivated around Grays Harbor, and are naturalized in Grays Harbor. It is found scattered around the harbor in areas that are not artificially seeded. The spat will be placed in areas that the Corps already conducts shell placement activities in, limiting impacts to eelgrass and mudflat fauna.

Because the experimental placement will occur on existing shell plots that are maintained as part of the ongoing crab mitigation project for which the Corps has already received concurrence, and Pacific oyster cultivation is widespread in Grays Harbor, the Corps believes that this action will have **no effect** on any of the threatened and endangered species or critical habitat that may occur in the vicinity.

No significant adverse impacts to water quality, flora and fauna, bathymetry, or threatened and endangered species are anticipated as a result of this experimental spat placement.

The Corps has made a preliminary determination that the environmental impacts of the proposal can be adequately evaluated under the National Environmental Policy Act through preparation of an environmental assessment (EA). Preparation of an EA addressing potential environmental impacts associated with the experimental spat placement is currently underway.

The Corps invites submission of factual comment on the environmental impacts of the proposal. The Corps will consider all submissions received before the expiration date of this notice. The nature or scope of the proposal may be changed upon consideration of

the comments received. The Corps will initiate an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and afford all the appropriate public participation opportunities attendant to an EIS, if significant effects on the quality of the human environment are identified and cannot be mitigated.

Comments should reach this office, Attn: Navigation Section, not later than March 16, 2006 to ensure consideration. Requests for additional information should be directed to Hiram Arden, Project Manager, at 206-764-3401.

Hiram Arden
Project Manager
Navigation Section