

Army Corps proposes test dredging for potential Grays Harbor entrance channel realignment

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SEATTLE--The Army Corps of Engineers proposes test dredging for a potential entrance channel realignment of the Grays Harbor and Chehalis River Federal navigation channel. The proposal is to remove approximately 110,000 cubic yards of sandy materials at the Grays Harbor coastal inlet using a hopper dredge in April 2007.

The purpose of hopper dredging along the selected test area is to establish a set of baseline conditions for determining if realignment would significantly decrease channel maintenance dredging requirements and enhance safety of deep-draft transportation in Grays Harbor, without significant adverse impact on the estuary's habitat and resources. The shoaling rate and patterns would be monitored over the course of the year following dredging.

The proposed dredged material has been tested and met open-water disposal criteria. All sediment testing data are available at the Seattle District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Dredge Material Management Office.

The Corps has incorporated several impact avoidance, minimization, and compensation measures into the proposed test plan, including: trawl surveys in the test dredge area in advance of test dredging activities, coordinating with commercial crab fisherman to minimize disruption to their harvest activities, and placing oyster shell on intertidal mudflats to improve survival rates for young-of-the-year crabs.

The Corps has evaluated potential impacts of the proposed action to listed and proposed species. A preliminary determination has been made that the work may affect, but will not likely adversely affect several species. The Corps received concurrence letters from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service on May 24, 2006, and from National Marine Fisheries Service on May 16, 2006.

The Corps will base its decision to allow test hopper dredging for potential entrance channel realignment at Grays Harbor on an evaluation of the probable impact of the proposed activity on the public interest. All factors which may be relevant to the proposal will be considered; such as conservation, economics, esthetics, general environmental concerns, historic values, fish and wildlife values, flood damage prevention, land use, navigation, recreation, water quality, energy needs safety, food production and, in general, the needs, and welfare of the people.

The proposed placement has been evaluated for compliance with guidelines promulgated by the Environmental Protection Agency under authority of Section 404(b)(1) of the Clean Water Act.

The State of Washington is reviewing this work for compliance with the applicable state and federal water quality standards pursuant to Section 401 of the Clean Water Act. The Corps has made a

determination that the proposed work is consistent to the maximum practicable extent with the State of Washington Coastal Zone Management Program.

A draft environmental assessment has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. The draft EA and public notice for the test dredging proposal are available on the Seattle District's web site, <http://www.nws.usace.army.mil> (follow links to Environmental Resources Section, Environmental Documents page). The draft EA's public comment period expires Jan. 27, 2007. The comment period for the dredging proposal expires Feb. 19, 2007.

All email comments should be sent to hram.t.arden@usace.army.mil. Conventional mail comments should be sent to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Navigation Section, P.O. Box 3755, Seattle, WA 98124-3755.