

**DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT  
IMPACT**

**BENEFICIAL USE OF DREDGE MATERIAL  
WOODLAND ISLANDS  
COLUMBIA RIVER FEDERAL NAVIGATION CHANNEL  
COWLITZ COUNTY, WASHINGTON**

**February 2018**

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and implementing regulations promulgated by the Council on Environmental Quality (40 C.F.R. parts 1500-1508) and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE or Corps) (33 C.F.R. part 230), USACE, Portland District has prepared and integrated an Environmental Assessment (EA) into the 2018 Feasibility Study for the Beneficial Use of Dredged Material/Woodland Islands project on the Washington side of the Columbia River Federal Navigation Channel (CRFNC), Cowlitz County, Washington. That integrated FS/EA is hereby incorporated by reference.

**Purpose and Need**

The purpose of this project is to beneficially use dredged material from the Columbia River navigation channel operations and maintenance program to restore and expand shallow water habitat for fish and wildlife species in accordance with Section 204 of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 1992. The need for the project is to restore shallow water and wetland habitats to help rebuild Columbia River salmon populations listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA). Additionally, restoration of these habitats would be expected to support waterfowl, shorebirds, neotropical migratory songbirds, native mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and non-ESA listed aquatic species.

**Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative**

The Proposed Action, which is also the Corps' Preferred Alternative, proposes to place up to 400,000 cubic yards of clean dredge material (medium to fine-grained sand) on the back side of the middle Woodland Island to create low velocity shallow water and riparian scrub-shrub wetland habitat to restore habitat for threatened and endangered migratory salmonids and passerine songbirds. After placement, the sand would be graded to create various bathymetric elevations that will encourage establishment of emergent and fringe marsh habitat. In addition, plantings would be placed to support the establishment of willow-dominated fringe wetlands where existing vegetation is disturbed during construction. The primary benefit of the Proposed Action would be to establish habitats lacking in the Columbia River ecosystem.

**Findings**

Regulations implementing NEPA require federal agencies to “provide sufficient evidence and analysis for determining whether to prepare an environmental impact statement [EIS] or a finding of no significant impact” (FONSI) on actions authorized, funded, or carried out by the Federal government. 40 C.F.R. § 1508.9(a)(1). A FONSI is appropriate when an agency determines a proposed action “will not have a significant effect on the human environment.” 40 C.F.R. § 1508.13. In determining whether a proposed action’s effects are significant, agencies

are required to consider both the context and intensity of the impacts. 40 C.F.R. § 1508.27. In regard to the intensity of the impacts, 40 C.F.R. § 1508.27(b) provides ten factors that agencies should consider in determining whether the impacts are significant. The following questions are the ten factors from (1) to (10):

1) Are there impacts that are both beneficial and adverse?

The anticipated impacts of the Proposed Action are likely to benefit aquatic and terrestrial species in the Lower Columbia River Estuary, although not to a significant degree in relation to the system as a whole, as described in Chapter 4 of the integrated FS/EA. While minor and short-term adverse effects may result from the initial placement of dredge material on site, these effects are not considered significant. The effects are described in detail in Chapter 4 of the integrated FS/EA. Overall, neither the beneficial nor adverse effects of the Proposed Action are expected to be significant.

2) Can the proposed action be reasonably expected to have substantial adverse impacts on public health and safety?

No adverse impacts on public health and safety would result from implementation of the Proposed Action. As described in Chapter 4 of the integrated FS/EA, the Corps' contractor will be required to employ best management practices during dredge operations.

3) Are there unique characteristics of geographic area?

The proposed project area is located within the Lower Columbia River Estuary, which provides important habitat for various terrestrial wildlife species, many salmonid species, and other aquatic species, all of which would benefit from the implementation of the Proposed Action. Effects of the action on the project area are explained in detail in Chapter 4 of the integrated FS/EA.

4) Are the effects on the quality of the human environment likely to be highly controversial?

The Proposed Action is not likely to result in highly controversial effects on the quality of the human environment. Anticipated effects of the project on all affected environments, including the socio-economic environment, are discussed in detail in Chapters 4, 5.2, and 5.7 of the integrated FS/EA.

5) Are the effects highly uncertain or do they involve unique or unknown risks?

Habitat restoration using dredge material at this project location is not associated with highly uncertain effects or unique or unknown risks. A suite of hydraulic and habitat benefit models have been run to assess the impacts and potential benefits of the project. These results are discussed in detail in Appendix B, Appendix F, and in Chapter 4 of the integrated FS/EA.

6) Does the action establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration?

Beneficial use of dredge material would not be precedent-setting or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. It is already an existing option within regional sediment management initiatives. Therefore, the Proposed Action does not set precedent and is not likely to result significant effects as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 of the integrated FS/EA.

7) Are the impacts individually insignificant but cumulatively significant?

The potential effects of the Proposed Action are not likely to be individually or cumulatively significant when combined with effects of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. A discussion of cumulative effects of the Proposed Action is included in Chapter 4.7 of the integrated FS/EA.

8) Does the action adversely affect properties listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources?

The Proposed Action would not affect historic properties or significant cultural or historical resources as described in Chapters 4.3 and 6.6 of the integrated FS/EA. The Corps determined pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act that the Proposed Action has no potential to affect historic properties, and the Washington Department of Archeology and Historic Preservation concurred with this determination.

9) Does the action adversely affect endangered or threatened species or their critical habitat as determined under the ESA?

The Corps made a determination that the Proposed Action may affect but is not likely to adversely affect Columbian white-tailed deer and, after completion, the project will be wholly beneficial for deer. Additionally, the Corps determined the Proposed Action is not likely to adversely affect threatened or endangered salmonid species, eulachon, green sturgeon, or marine mammals. The effects of the Proposed Action on ESA-listed species and their critical habitat is described in detail in Chapters 4.2.3 and 6.2. The Corps is currently under consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Results of those consultation processes will be included in the final EA and signed FONSI.

10) Does the action threaten to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment?

The Proposed Action would not threaten to violate any Federal, State, or local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. As described in the feasibility report and documented in Chapter 6, the Corps evaluated potential effects from Proposed Action and coordinated with local, State and Federal resource agencies to document compliance of the action for applicable environmental laws and regulations.

## CONCLUSION

Based upon the impacts analysis contained in the integrated FS/EA and the information discussed above, I have determined that the Proposed Action to beneficially use dredge material to restore wetland habitat at Woodland Island will not have a significant effect on the human environment and, therefore, does not require the preparation of an EIS.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Aaron L. Dorf  
Colonel, Corps of Engineers  
District Commander