

RECORD OF DECISION

JACKSONVILLE HARBOR NAVIGATION STUDY DUVAL COUNTY, FLORIDA

The Final Integrated General Reevaluation Report II and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (GRRII/SEIS) dated January 2014, for the Jacksonville Harbor Navigation Study, incorporated herein by reference, addresses the effects of navigation channel modifications on the natural system and human environment. The final recommendation is contained in the report of the Chief of Engineers, dated April 16, 2014. Based on these reports, the reviews of other Federal, State, and local agencies, input from the public, and the review by my staff, I find the plan recommended by the Chief of Engineers to be technically feasible, economically justified, in accordance with environmental statutes, and in the public interest.

The GRRII/SEIS documents the evaluation of various alternatives that would improve transportation efficiency for commercial vessels. The recommended plan is the locally preferred plan (LPP), and includes:

- Deepening the existing channel of the St. John's River to -47 feet (all depths are mean lower low water (MLLW)) from the entrance channel to approximately river mile (RM) 13;
- Constructing a turning basin about 2,700-feet long by 1,500-feet wide near RM 10;
- Constructing a turning basin about 2,500-feet long by 1,500-feet wide near RM 13;
- As part of the LPP, widening Mile Point to the north by 200 feet (RM 3-5 area); to the south by 100 feet (RM 5-6 area); transitioning to 250 feet (RM 6 area) and back to 100 feet in the RM 6 area; and for St. Johns Bluff Reach: widen both sides of the channel varying amounts up to 300 feet in the RM 7-8 area;
- Placement of approximately 18,000,000 cubic yards of dredged material in the designated Ocean Dredged Material Disposal Site;
- Mitigation of unavoidable impacts through the preservation of approximately 638 acres of freshwater wetlands, river shoreline, salt marsh, and uplands. Monitoring and adaptive management are included as part of the recommended plan to assure mitigation success.

In addition to a "no action" plan, a number of nonstructural and structural alternatives were evaluated. The nonstructural alternatives included using additional tug boats and taking advantage of the natural high-tide cycle for deeper draft vessels to transit the harbor. Nonstructural alternatives were eliminated due to their inability to create transportation cost savings. Deepening alternatives between -41 and -50 feet in 1-foot increments were evaluated.

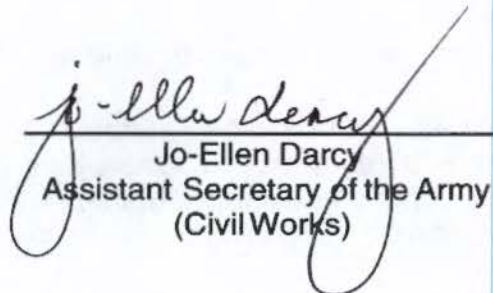
A widening-only alternative was considered independently, in addition to the deepening increments. The national economic development (NED) plan is the environmentally-preferable alternative. The recommended plan would be two feet deeper than the NED plan and was requested by the sponsor. In accordance with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers policy, the LPP was approved for consideration as the recommended plan on May 17, 2013 by my office.

Hydrodynamic and ecological modeling indicated that the recommended plan would result in minor changes in salinity levels, and correspondingly minor changes in salinity stress on freshwater wetlands and submerged aquatic vegetation, as well as minor changes in estuarine fish and macroinvertebrate distribution. Public review of the Draft GRRII/SEIS was completed on October 24, 2013. All comments submitted were responded to in the Final GRRII/SEIS. A 30-day review of the Final GRRII/SEIS was completed on April 7, 2014. None of the comments identified major issues that were not already addressed in the report or required modifications of the impact determinations.

All practicable means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental effects have been incorporated into the recommended plan. In accordance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service has been completed. All terms and conditions resulting from this consultation would be implemented in order to avoid or minimize take of endangered species. In addition, recommendations made in the FWS Final Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act Report would be implemented.

Technical and economic criteria used in the formulation of alternative plans were those specified in the Water Resource Council's 1983 Economic and Environmental Principles and Guidelines for Water and Related Land Resources Implementation Studies. All applicable laws, executive orders, regulations, and local government plans were considered in the evaluation of alternatives. Based on review of these evaluations, I find that the benefits of the recommended plan outweigh the costs and any adverse effects. This Record of Decision completes the National Environmental Policy Act process.

April 8, 2015
Date


Jo-Ellen Darcy
Assistant Secretary of the Army
(Civil Works)