

RIDGE ROAD EXTENSION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



NOVEMBER 2011

1. Why is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) involved in the proposed Ridge Road Extension project?

Under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, proposed projects that impact waters of the United States, including wetlands, must first receive a Department of the Army permit, issued by the Corps. The mission of the Corps' regulatory program is to protect the nation's aquatic resources while allowing reasonable development through fair, flexible and balanced permit decisions. Permit applicants Pasco County and the Florida Department of Transportation propose to construct the Ridge Road extension project, impacting waters that fall under the jurisdiction of the Corps. The Corps will evaluate the project, with input from interested parties and in consultation with appropriate resource agencies, and determine whether to issue or deny a permit. The Corps is neither a project proponent nor opponent.

2. Is the proposed roadway featured in the Corps' recent public notice the same project that the Corps has been reviewing for the past several years?

The Corps first published a public notice for this project in 2000 under file number SAJ-1998-02682. The application was considered incomplete and the project was withdrawn without further action. The applicants recently submitted a new, updated application. The new project file number is SAJ-2011-00551 (IP-TEH). The alignment of the proposed roadway remains unchanged from the 2000 proposal; however, proposed wetland impacts have been reduced by 7.35 acres as a result of the applicants' efforts to minimize those impacts.

3. Why do Pasco County and the Florida Department of Transportation want to construct the proposed Ridge Road Extension?

The applicants informed the Corps that the project purpose is to improve east-west roadway capacity between US-19

and US-41, and enhance overall mobility in both west and central Pasco County, in accordance with the county's current Comprehensive Plan and the Metropolitan Planning Organization's Long Range Transportation Plan. The project will also provide additional roadway capacity, improve routing away from coastal hazard areas and improve the hurricane evacuation process in accordance with state of Florida requirements and the county's current Comprehensive Plan.

4. Have the applicants looked at alternatives to building the roadway through the Serenova Preserve and other undeveloped lands?

The applicants evaluated 12 alternatives, including the proposed alignment. Seven of the alternatives require construction of a new roadway through the Serenova Preserve and other undeveloped lands on the eastern side of the Suncoast Parkway. Four alternatives involve the widening of existing roads including SR-52, SR-54, and the planned Tower Road. The applicants determined that the road widening alternatives were impracticable because the projected costs of those alternatives exceed available funding. The Corps will evaluate the updated alternatives analysis to determine if the applicants' proposed alignment is the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative.

5. Why did the Corps publish another public notice?

The public notice advises interested parties of proposed projects for which a permit is sought and solicits their comments and additional information, if any. The Corps considers this input in its evaluation of the probable impact of the project on the public interest. A permit cannot be granted if the Corps determines the project is contrary to the public interest. The Corps' evaluation includes a careful weighing of the expected project benefits and detriments. A determination by the Corps that a project is not contrary to the public interest is insufficient, in and of itself, to issue a permit. The Corps must also determine that the project

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meets Clean Water Act Section 404(b)(1) guidelines by representing the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative. Given the length of time since the previous public notice was published in 2000, the Corps determined that an additional public notice was warranted.

6. Why has the Corps been evaluating the project for so long?

Prior to the recent receipt of an updated application, the Corps had not received sufficient information from the applicant to determine if the project complied with applicable regulations. Additionally, many interested parties had voiced opposition to the project in response to the 2000 public notice, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), non-governmental organizations and individual citizens. These concerns centered around potential effects of the project on endangered species and the analysis of potential alternatives to the project. Without sufficient information from the applicant, and because of these significant objections, the Corps was unable to make a decision. Over the next several months, the Corps will evaluate the new application, in consultation with appropriate resource agencies, to make such a determination.

7. Is the Corps ready to issue or deny a permit for this project?

Prior to the recent receipt of the updated application, the Corps had not received sufficient information from the applicant to determine if the project complies with applicable regulations. The Corps will, over the next several months, evaluate this new application to make such a determination and either issue or deny the permit.

8. Will an Environmental Impact Statement be prepared for this project?

The Corps will first prepare an Environmental Assessment of the proposed project. The Environmental Assessment will assist the Corps in determining whether an Environmental Impact Statement is warranted. Environmental Impact Statements are prepared when the Environmental Assessment reveals that the project will have a significant effect on the human environment.

9. Will there be a public hearing?

Any person may request a public hearing. The request must be submitted in writing to the District Engineer within the designated public notice comment period and must state the specific reasons for requesting the public hearing. Public hearings are held in accordance with 33 C.F.R. Part 327. Requests for public hearings are granted unless the Corps determines that the issues raised are insubstantial or there is otherwise no valid interest to be served by a hearing. After a thorough review of all comments received on the project in response to the recent public notice and prior to reaching a permit decision, the Corps will decide whether a public hearing is warranted. Any parties that request a public hearing will be notified of the Corps' decision in this regard.

10. How can the public learn more about the project?

In addition to the project details featured in the public notice, interested parties may obtain a copy of Pasco County's updated alternatives analysis and the proposed mitigation plans for both Pasco County and the Florida Department of Transportation. These documents are available for download at www.saj.usace.army.mil/Divisions/Regulatory/interest.htm under the "Ridge Road Extension" header. Alternatively, a printed copy or disk may be requested by contacting Tracy Hurst, project manager, by e-mail (Tracy.E.Hurst@usace.army.mil), phone (813-769-7063), fax (813-769-7061), or mail at U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Attn: Tracy Hurst, 10117 Princess Palm Avenue, Suite 120, Tampa, Florida 33610.

11. How can the public comment on the project?

The comment period for the public notice ends on December 28, 2011. Comments may be sent to Tracy Hurst, project manager, at the following address:

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Attn: Tracy Hurst
10117 Princess Palm Avenue, Suite 120
Tampa, Florida 33610

Questions and comments may also be submitted by:

e-mail: Tracy.E.Hurst@usace.army.mil
fax: (813)-769-7061

FOR MORE INFORMATION



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