



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
CORPS OF ENGINEERS, NEW ORLEANS DISTRICT
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NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA 70118

Regional Planning and
Environment Division South
Environmental Planning Branch

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (571)

West Shore Lake Pontchartrain Hurricane and Storm Damage Risk Reduction Levee
System

St. Charles and St. John the Baptist Parishes, Louisiana

Description of the proposed action. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Mississippi River Valley Division (MVD), Regional Planning and Environment Division South (RPEDS), has prepared this Supplemental Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the New Orleans District (CEMVN) to evaluate potential impacts of a levee shift and related activities necessary to construct the levee alignment footprint in St. John the Baptist and St. Charles Parishes, Louisiana, as described in the West Shore Lake Pontchartrain Environmental Impact Statement (2016 WSLP EIS; <http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/About/Projects/West-Shore-Lake-Pontchartrain/>). The Record of Decision (ROD) for the 2016 WSLP EIS was signed by the Assistant Secretary of the Army on September 14, 2016. Supplemental Environmental Assessment #570, West Shore Lake Pontchartrain Hurricane and Storm Damage Risk Reduction Structural Alignment Surveys and Borings Investigations St. Charles and St. John the Baptist Parishes, Louisiana (SEA 570) also investigated some levee alignment shifts as well as the addition of five stockpile/staging areas for construction related activities and the addition of a mitigation bank credit purchase option into the mitigation plan approved in the 2016 WSLP EIS for compensating bottomland hardwoods (BLH) impacts. The Finding of No Significant Impacts (FONSI) associated with SEA 570 was signed by the CEMVN District Commander on May 13, 2019. The 2016 WSLP EIS and ROD, and SEA 570 and FONSI are hereby incorporated by reference.

The proposed action would include modifications to the levee system in St. John the Baptist and St. Charles Parishes, Louisiana described in the 2016 WSLP EIS, and features described in SEA 570. The modifications proposed herein would be in a similar location with similar features as described in the 2016 WSLP EIS and SEA 570. Nowhere within the proposed action levee system alignment/footprint would there be a 100% overlap with the 2016 WSLP EIS levee system alignment/footprint. This is due to an increase in the levee footprint where the results of field investigations and advanced engineering and design have found it necessary, and a shift in the entire levee system to accommodate for the recent installation of a new pipeline. The levee system would

be between approximately 20 – 100 feet wider from the upper guide levee of the Bonnet Carré Spillway to near the crossing at US Highway 61 where it would decrease to approximately the same width as described in the 2016 WSLP EIS. The proposed action also includes additional levee system ROW for pump station construction. Approximately 30-40% of the current levee system ROW is co-located with the 2016 WSLP EIS levee system ROW. The exact location of the levee system ROW could still shift slightly, but no less than approximately 30% of it would be co-located with the 2016 WSLP EIS and levee size would not change.

There are four shifts, other than the increase in size and slight shift due to installation of a new pipeline. Three shifts that could aid in the constructability, improve the engineering, and decrease the utility relocations needed for the alignment are being considered. A fourth shift would accommodate CPRA's River Reintroduction into Maurepas Swamp Project.

Other modifications that are part of the proposed action include:

1. Updated borrow plan
2. Modifications to access roads
3. Addition of new access roads
4. Sand placement plan
5. Updated drainage structure design
6. Addition of new drainage structures
7. Updated pump station design
8. Addition of new pump stations
9. Updated transportation plan
10. Potential for the NFS to design and build the western section of the levee system
11. Potential to alter existing spoil banks in the Project Area and vicinity

Construction for the proposed action is expected to end in 2023 according to the current schedule.

The proposed action would directly impact approximately 26 less acres of swamp (28 less AAHUs) and 93 more acres of BLH (54 more AAHUs) and indirectly impact approximately 1,322 more acres of swamp (143 less AAHUs) and 4,546 more acres of BLH (121 more AAHUs) as compared to the 2016 WSLP EIS and SEA 570. A total of 1,295 more swamp acres (171 less AAHUs) and 4,639 more acres of BLH (175 more AAHUs) would be impacted as a result of the proposed action. All impacts to wetlands would be offset through either the purchase of mitigation bank credits or the construction of new, restored or enhanced habitats to replace the lost habitats in accordance with the Clean Water Act, Section 404(b)(1) and the Water Resources Development Act of 1986, Section 906, as amended. The mitigation plan is described in SEA 576.

Factors Considered in Determination. CEMVN has assessed the impacts of the No-Action and the proposed action alternatives on important resources, including

hydrology, water quality, wetlands, wildlife resources, aquatic and fisheries resources, Threatened, Endangered, and Protected Species, cultural resources, soils and prime and unique farmland, aesthetics and visual resources, recreational resources, environmental justice, air quality, noise, and transportation. No significant adverse impacts were identified for any of these important resources. All practical means of avoiding adverse environmental effects have been adopted. All unavoidable habitat impacts would be fully mitigated through the plan identified in SEA 576.

In correspondence dated June 11, 2020, (CZD 20140059 mod05), the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (LDNR) stated that the Proposed Action is consistent, to the maximum extent practicable, with the Louisiana Coastal Resources Program. The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ) issued a State Water Quality Certification (WQC 200512-01) on May 15, 2020 and a Section 404(b)(1) was signed on June 12, 2020 at the end of a 30 day public review period. In a letter dated November 30, 2017, the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) stated that no known historic properties would be affected by undertaking the Proposed Action. Through correspondence dated March 25, 2020, the USFWS stated that the Proposed Action would not likely adversely affect any threatened or endangered species in the Project Area. CEMVN has concurred with, or resolved, all draft Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act recommendations contained in a letter from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) dated June 11, 2020.

The CEMVN would implement and comply with the stipulations identified in the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Programmatic Agreement regarding the WSLP Hurricane Storm Damage Risk Reduction System, as executed on May 16, 2014.

Environmental Design Commitments. The following commitments, as recommended by the USFWS are an integral part of the proposed action:

1) Hydrologic gages will be planned and installed in the vicinity of the Proposed Action. These data would be used to test the WVA assumptions made in regards to indirect impacts to forested wetlands.

2) A qualified biologist will inspect the proposed work site for the presence of undocumented nesting wading bird colonies and eagle's nests during the nesting season (i.e., September 1 through February 15 for wading bird nesting colonies and October through mid-May for bald eagles).

3) For areas containing nesting wading birds (i.e., herons, egrets, night-herons, ibises, roseate spoonbills, anhingas, and/or cormorants), all activity occurring within 1,000 feet of a nesting colony will be restricted to the non-nesting period.

4) If an eagle's nest is discovered within 1,500 feet of the proposed action, then an evaluation and coordination with USFWS will be performed.

5) All on-site personnel are responsible for observing water-related activities for the presence of manatee(s). All work, equipment, and vessel operation should cease if a manatee is spotted within a 50-foot radius (buffer zone) of the active work area. Once

the manatee has left the buffer zone of its own accord (manatees must not be herded or harassed into leaving), or after 30 minutes have passed without additional sightings of manatee(s) in the buffer zone, in-water work can resume under careful observation for manatee(s).

6) Authorizations and permissions will be obtained from Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries prior to any work on the Maurepas Swamp Wildlife Management Area. Compensatory mitigation for impacts on LDWF property would occur on LDWF property to the extent practicable.

Public Involvement. Public Notice of the release and availability of the draft SEA and FONSI for public comment was published in the New Orleans Advocate on April 21, 2020. They were also mailed to persons and entities on the public mailing list for a 30 day public review and comment period that started April 23, 2020, and it was made available for download at <https://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/About/Projects/BBA-2018/West-Shore-Lake-Pontchartrain/>.

The proposed action has been coordinated with appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies and businesses, organizations, and individuals. Eleven comments were received during the public review of SEA 571 that covered a variety of topics, including concerns regarding changes in water surface elevation outside of the project area, mitigation planning, and wetland impacts. Two comments asked for copies of the draft SEA. Five comments offered no objection or explicit support for the proposed action. All comments received during the public review period and responses to these comments can be found in Appendix VIII.

Conclusion. CEMVN Environmental Planning Branch has assessed the potential environmental impacts of the Proposed Action, considered all public comments received during the public review period, and has determined that the action, if implemented, would not cause significant environmental impacts. Any habitat impacts would be mitigated through implementation of the mitigation plan described in SEA 576.

I have reviewed SEA 571 and have considered public and agency comments and recommendations. Based on the assessment conducted in SEA #571 and the implementation of the environmental design commitments listed above, I have determined that the proposed action will not have significant impacts and does not require the preparation of a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.

The plan is justified and in accordance with environmental statutes. It is in the public interest to implement the proposed action in SEA 571.

Date

6/29/20



Stephen Murphy,
Colonel, U.S. Army
District Commander