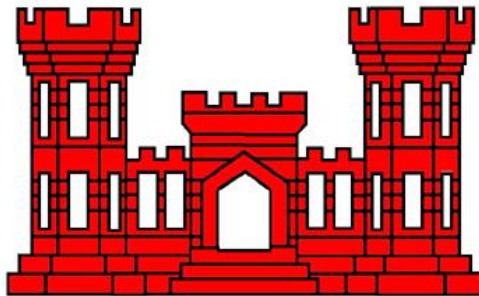


**Amite River and Tributaries-Comprehensive Study East of the Mississippi River,
Louisiana**

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FINAL SCOPING REPORT



Friday, August 9, 2019

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1.0 Introduction

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 established a nationwide policy to include a detailed statement of the environmental impact in every recommendation or report on proposals for major Federal actions significantly affecting the environment. This detailed statement is the environmental impact statement (EIS).

On April 2, 2019, the Federal Register (Vol. 84, No. 63) published a notice of intent (NOI) for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New Orleans District (USACE) to prepare a Draft Integrated Feasibility Report and Environmental Impact Statement (DIFR–EIS) for the Amite River and Tributaries-Comprehensive Study East of the Mississippi River, Louisiana. The purpose of the NOI was to announce the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ (USACE) intention to prepare a draft EIS for this flood risk management study. Scoping meeting announcements were advertised in the local newspapers and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New Orleans District websites leading up to the scoping meetings. These meetings were held in Denham Springs, LA and Clinton, LA on April 24, 2019 and Prairieville on April 25, 2019.

The purpose of the study is to determine the feasibility of flood risk management measures (structural and non-structural) in the Amite River Basin. The DIFR-EIS will document the existing conditions of environmental resources in and around areas considered for construction, and potential impacts on those resources as a result of implementing the alternatives.

NEPA provides for an early and open public process for determining the scope of issues, resources, impacts, and alternatives to be addressed in an EIS (referred to as scoping). This scoping report outlines the project background and scoping process to date, and summarizes the key issues identified by members of the public during the initial scoping period.

2.0 Study Authority

The study is being performed in response to the standing authority of Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, (Pub. L. 115–123), Division B, Subdivision 1, H. R. 1892—13, Title IV, Corps Of Engineers—Civil, Department Of The Army, Investigations, dated December 31, 1970 (33 U.S.C. 549a) which authorizes studies to review the operation of completed Federal projects and recommend project modifications when found advisable due to significantly changed physical or economic conditions.

3.0 Proposed Action

The USACE will serve as the lead Federal agency in the preparation of the EIS. Other federal and/or state agencies may participate as cooperating and/or commenting agencies throughout the EIS process. In accordance with Executive order, 1307, referred to as One Federal Decision (OFD), the USACE and other agencies with environmental review, authorization, or consultation responsibilities for major infrastructure projects should develop a single EIS for such projects, sign a single Record of Decision (ROD) and issue all necessary authorizations within 90 days

thereafter, subject to limited exceptions. Participating cooperating agencies include the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), and the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA).

The USACE will focus their analysis on the following resources as applicable: Aesthetics and visual resources, water quality, aquatic resources/wetlands, fish and wildlife resources, threatened and endangered species and other protected species of concern, cultural and historic resources and tribal trust resources, floodplains, hazardous, toxic and radioactive waste, hydrology, land use, navigation and public infrastructure, socio-economics, environmental justice and soils.

The USACE will evaluate a range of alternatives for the proposed action including structural and nonstructural measures. For the reasonable and practicable alternatives, the USACE will fully evaluate them, including the no action alternative. Alternatives may result in avoidance and minimization, and mitigation measures of impacts to reduce or offset any impacts.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will assist in documenting existing conditions and assessing effects of project alternatives through the Fish and Wildlife Start Coordination Act consultation procedures. Other environmental review and consultation requirements for the proposed project include the need for Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality Clean Water Act Section 401 water quality. In addition, because the proposed project may affect federally listed species, the USACE will consult with the Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in accordance with Endangered Species Act, Section 7. The NMFS will be consulted regarding the effects of this proposed project on Essential Fish Habitat per the Magnuson–Stevens Act. The USACE will also be consulting with the State Historic Preservation Officer under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act concerning properties listed, or potentially eligible for listing. The USACE will also be coordinating with the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources for Coastal Zone Management Consistency per the Coastal Zone Management Act.

4.0 Scoping Process

NEPA affords all persons, organizations, and government agencies the right to review and comment on proposed major Federal actions that are evaluated by a NEPA document. Known as the scoping process, this is the initial step in the preparation of the EIS and helps identify: (1) the range of actions (project and procedural changes), (2) alternatives (both those to be explored rigorously and evaluated, and those that may be eliminated), and (3) the range of environmental resources considered in the evaluation of environmental impacts.

A. Public Notification

The public was notified of both public meetings using the following communication mechanisms: local newspaper and the project website, [https:// www.mvn.usace.army.mil/About/Projects/BBA-2018/studies/](https://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/About/Projects/BBA-2018/studies/)

B. Scoping Meetings

The public scoping meetings were held as follows:

Wednesday, April 24, 2019
Denham Springs - Walker Branch Library
West Meeting Room
8101 Florida BLVD, Denham Springs, LA 70726
6 to 8 p.m.

Wednesday, April 24, 2019
East Feliciana Police Jury Office
12064 Marston Street
Clinton, LA 70722
6 to 8 p.m.

Thursday April 25, 2019
Galvez Branch Library, Meeting Room 2
40300 Highway 42 at Autumn Leaves Drive,
Prairieville, LA 70769
5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

The open house style meetings provided attendees with an opportunity to visit a series of poster stations staffed by project team members and subject matter experts regarding the following topics: Plan Formulation, Environmental, Project Management. For all scoping meetings, the general public also had the opportunity to view a live-stream video on the USACE Facebook page.

This Scoping Report presents and summarizes the scoping comments expressed at the public scoping meetings, as well as all other scoping comments received during the scoping period beginning 2 April 2019, and ending 8 July 2019. This Scoping Report indicates where in the draft EIS individual comments will be addressed. The report will be provided to all scoping participants who provided their address, and will be published on project website, <https://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/About/Projects/BBA-2018/studies/>.

5.0 Scoping Participants

A total of at least 80 people attended the three scoping meetings, with 36 in Livingston Parish, 13 in East Feliciana Parish, and 31 in Ascension Parish. These included, but were not limited to, private citizens, stakeholders, non-governmental organizations, and political representatives.

On the Facebook live feed, there were 3,184 present on Wednesday; and 3,687 present on Thursday.

6.0 Scoping Meeting Comments

Scoping comments document the public's concerns about the scope of the proposed course of action, as well as identify significant resources and suggested alternatives. Scoping comments will be considered during the study process and preparation of the draft EIS.

A. Scoping Comment Categorization by Theme

A total of 37 comments were collected during from comment cards, emails, a slide presentation, and a letter received. These comments were categorized by concern or issue identified by the commenters. A concern or issue raised more than three times became a theme. A total of 4 recurring themes were identified, including an "other" category. The "other" category includes issues or concerns that were raised only once, or comments that were not directly related to the

proposed action, such as “The meeting needs to be earlier.” A meeting from 6-9 p.m. is a bit much.” Each comment was assigned to only one theme. The top 4 themes are discussed in this section.

The first theme is “Flooding concerns,” and this involves issues surrounding floodwater impacts, including localized and regional impacts, especially those affecting property owners. A total of 6 comments were identified with this theme (See Table 1), and they cover flood impacts from trees in Pretty Creek, the Amite River Diversion renovation inducing further flooding, and a college professor’s hydrology study on the confluence of Comite and Amite River.

The second theme “Dredging opportunities,” which involves requests for investigating dredging along various reaches in the study area. The 3 comments cover dredging boatways for creating land for public use, dredging Bayou Manchac to address siltation, and dredging the Amite River.

The third theme “Levee concerns” pertains to levee alignments in the study area. The theme had 3 comments on the Laurel Ridge levee extension (a non-Corps project) and a suggested alternative for a levee upriver of Lake Maurepas.

The fourth theme “Ecosystem-wide flood and storm risk reduction” involves requests for investigating habitat restoration throughout the study area and considering impacts to wildlife and species of conservation need. A total of 5 comments were identified for this theme.

1. Flooding concerns – 6
2. Dredging opportunities – 3
3. Levee concerns – 4
4. Ecosystem-wide flood and storm risk reduction – 5
5. Other - 19

Table 1. Consolidated comments and location in the DEIS

| Location in EIS | | | | | | | Consolidated Comments/ Themes | Number of Comments | Percent of Occurrence |
|---|-----|----|----|----|---|----|--|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| PN | Alt | AE | EC | CC | M | CI | | | |
| | | X | X | | | X | Address flooding concern | 6 | 16% |
| | X | | | | | | Investigate dredging opportunity(s) | 3 | 8% |
| | X | | | X | | X | Consider levees | 4 | 11% |
| X | X | X | | | | | Consider ecosystem-wide flood and storm risk reduction | 5 | 14% |
| | X | X | X | X | | X | Other | 19 | 51% |
| Total | | | | | | | | 37* | 100% |
| <p>Location in EIS: PN – Purpose and Needs Alt – Alternatives AE – Affected Environment EC – Environmental Consequences CC – Consultation and Coordination M- Mitigation CI – Cumulative impact. *Note: The number of occurrences is greater than the total number of comments received because a given comment can be associated with more than one theme. The percentages are based on dividing the number of occurrences of a given theme by the total number of occurrence and multiplying by 100.</p> | | | | | | | | | |

7.0 Opportunities for Public Input

The official deadline for receipt of comments for preliminary scoping was 8 July 2019. USACE New Orleans District has received comments on this project as the alternatives. Additionally, the

draft EIS document will be available for a 45-day public review and comment for a 45-day period that is currently scheduled for 4 December 2019.

8.0 Resource Agency Input

A stakeholder meeting was held with the resource agencies on June 18 2019 including both state and Federal agencies. Further concerns emerged for addressing the study with nature-based solutions, especially river and bottomland hardwoods habitat restoration. The USACE will include this in the Consultation and Coordination section in the draft EIS.

9.0 Website

The following project website (<https://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/About/Projects/BBA-2018/studies/>) will be updated with new information as needed, including a copy of this final scoping report.