



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
WILMINGTON DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS
69 DARLINGTON AVENUE
WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA 28403-1343

September 13, 2019

Planning and Environmental Branch

Dear Sir or Madam:

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Wilmington District, is reviewing the Wilmington Harbor Navigation Improvement Project (WHNIP) 203 Study to evaluate the federal interest in the proposed deepening and widening of the Wilmington Harbor Federal Navigation Channel leading from the Atlantic Ocean to the Port of Wilmington, Cape Fear River, North Carolina. The 203 study has been sponsored and prepared by the North Carolina State Ports Authority (NCSPA) under the authority granted by Section 203 of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 1986 (P.L. 99-662) as amended.

The Wilmington Harbor project originates offshore and extends approximately 38 miles from the Atlantic Ocean and up the Cape Fear River to the City of Wilmington, NC where it services the Port of Wilmington (Figure 1). The current project authorization provides for a channel depth of -44 feet Mean Lower Low Water (MLLW) through the ocean bar and entrance channel, then to a depth of -42 feet (MLLW) to just downstream of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge. The Port of Wilmington has experienced significant increases in cargo volume and in the size of vessels calling at the port since the last major channel improvements were completed by USACE under the Wilmington Harbor 1996 WRDA Project. Due to expansion of the Panama Canal and navigation improvement projects at all other major U.S. East Coast ports, the U.S. East Coast to Asia shipping alliances are currently transitioning to vessels that are substantially larger and more economically efficient than the vessels that the -42-foot channel was originally designed to accommodate.

Currently authorized channel dimensions at Wilmington Harbor have the potential to impact trade at the Port of Wilmington, especially as ocean carriers transition to larger containerships. The NCSPA has initiated this Section 203 study to determine the feasibility of potential improvements to the federal navigation project at Wilmington Harbor, to include deepening the existing federal navigational channel, extending the ocean entrance channel farther offshore, and widening portions of the Wilmington Harbor Federal navigation channel. The purpose of these potential improvements is to efficiently accommodate larger Asia cargo vessels.

The Corps is now requesting comments from the public and agencies to identify significant resources and issues of concern with regard to the proposed modifications of

the Federal navigation channel. Comments received as a result of this scoping letter will be considered during preparation of the integrated study report and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

The DEIS is being prepared in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, and will address the project's relationship to all applicable Federal and State laws and Executive Orders. Resources known to occur in the study area include fisheries and benthic resources; threatened and endangered species, human resources (including socioeconomic, recreational and aesthetic resources); and cultural resources. Potential impacts to these resources, as well as water quality, air quality, potential hazardous and toxic wastes, and cumulative effects will be fully addressed in the DEIS. Should there be other issues which you believe should be discussed in the DEIS, please take this opportunity to bring them to our attention.

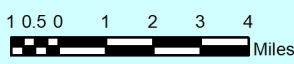
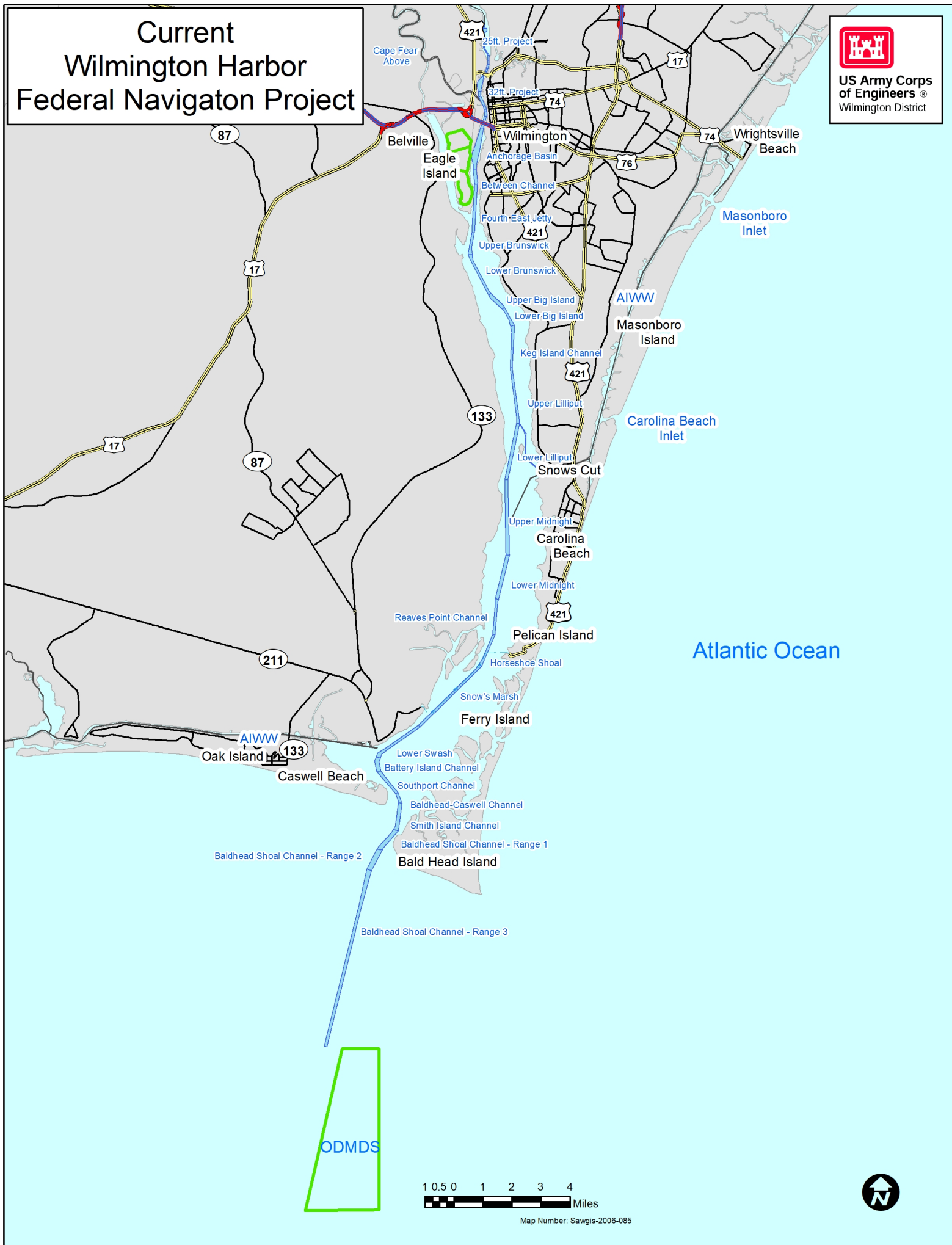
A public scoping meeting will be held on September 26, 2019, at the Wilmington Coastline Convention Center, 501 Nutt Street, Downtown Wilmington, at 6 PM. Input provided at this meeting or in response to this scoping letter may result in coordination with individuals or agencies on an as-needed basis to discuss certain issues. In order to effectively address any concerns that are raised, we need to have your input no later than 30 days from the date of this letter (October 12, 2019). Input may be provided at the public scoping meeting, via regular mail to the Environmental Resources Section, USACE Wilmington District, 69 Darlington Ave, Wilmington, NC 28403, or by email to WHNIP203@usace.army.mil.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Elden Gatwood". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Elden" and last name "Gatwood" clearly distinguishable.

Elden Gatwood
Chief, Planning and
Environmental Branch

Current Wilmington Harbor Federal Navigaton Project



Map Number: Sawgis-2006-085