Finding of No Significant Impact

Wilmington Harbor Navigation Improvements
Wilmington, North Carolina
Integrated Feasibility Report and Environmental Assessment

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Wilmington District (Corps), has conducted an environmental analysis in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended. The Corps assessed the effects of the following actions in the Wilmington Harbor Navigation Improvements, Final Integrated Feasibility Report and Environmental Assessment, dated October 2018.

As District Commander, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Wilmington District, it is my duty in the role of responsible Federal official to review and evaluate, in light of public interest, the stated views of other interested agencies and concerned public, the environmental effects of this proposed action.

My evaluation and findings are as follows:

- **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

Development of the alternatives for the Wilmington Harbor Navigation Improvements Project (WHIP) study began in 2012. The Corps collected information and coordinated with Federal, State, and local agencies with knowledge of the project resources. The data collection, agency comments, and findings of the planning team resulted in the Recommended Plan, which consists of the Entrance Channel, Reach 1 realignment and the Battery Island Turn widening.

The Recommended Plan would realign the entrance channel up to 150 ft to the west of the existing channel, away from the shoal that forms on the east side of the channel. This would result in a onetime reduction of approximately 181,000 cy dredged during the next regular Operations and Maintenance (O&M) cycle. The realignment would not reduce the littoral sediment flow into the channel or the rate at which the channel will shoal. Maintenance dredging from 2007 to 2015 has produced an average of approximately 364,000 cy per dredging event in this reach. The dredged material from the relocation of the Entrance Channel, Reach 1 is beach compatible sediment, therefore it will be returned to the adjacent beach system, in accordance with the 2000 Environmental Assessment's (EA) Sand Management Plan.

The Recommended Plan would also widen the Battery Island channel from 500 feet to 750 ft, provide a 750 ft wide by about 1,300 ft long cutoff between Battery Island and Lower Swash channels, and provide additional tapers where Southport and Lower Swash channels join the widened Battery Island channel. These modifications to the existing channel would increase the available turning radius from approximately 2,850 ft to approximately 3,900 ft.

Dredged material from construction of the Battery Island Turn is not beach compatible material, therefore it will be placed in the EPA authorized Wilmington Ocean Dredged Material Disposal Site (ODMDS). The use of the site will be in accordance with the current Wilmington ODMDS Site Management and Monitoring Plan (SMMP). The ODMDS is located approximately 5 nautical miles (nmi) offshore from Bald Head Island, North Carolina. The Wilmington ODMDS has an area of about 9.4 square nautical miles (nmi^2). Depths within the ODMDS range from about -35 to -52 feet local Mean Lower Low Water (MLLW).

- **Coordination**

A scoping letter describing the proposed Wilmington Harbor Navigation Improvement Project and requesting public and agency participation was circulated July 5, 2012 and a scoping meeting was held on August 7, 2012 in Wilmington, NC. Agency and public responses were received from: the US Department of Interior – US Fish and Wildlife Service, US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration - National Marine Fisheries Service, State of North Carolina (Natural Heritage Program, Division of Coastal Management and Department of Cultural Resources), Village of Bald Head Island, Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton LLP representing Towns of Caswell Beach and Oak Island, and North Carolina Baptist Assembly.

Wilmington District has coordinated the recommended proposed action with Federal, state, and local agencies and issued a Public Notice in June 2014, to solicit comments. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided its Section 7(a)(1) of the Endangered Species Act concurrence on August 6, 2014. The National Marine Fisheries Service provided its Section 7(a)(1) of the Endangered Species Act concurrence on January 28, 2016. The North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office has determined the project will have no adverse effect on historic properties by letter dated August 11, 2014.

A summary of the most significant public comments and the responses thereto are as follows:

- Comment- The Recommended Plan should have included the Turning Basin Alternative based upon the anticipated arrival of larger Post-Panamax vessels at the Port of Wilmington.
  Response- The design vessel for this study is the same design vessel used in the Wilmington Harbor '96 Act Project. Furthermore, the environmental mitigation, increased initial construction and added O&M costs resulted in a benefit to cost ratio less than 1.0 to 1, which is required for a federal project element to be recommended for construction.
- Comment- The Village of Bald Head Island commented that the recommended plan for realigning Baldhead Shoal Reach 1 of the Inner Ocean Bar Entrance Channel lacks both economic and engineering justification.
  Response- Our analysis has indicated that there is a one-time economic benefit from relocating a portion of the entrance channel to the west, and that it is also technically feasible and environmentally sound.

- Comment- The Corps is required to assess potential impacts to adjacent beaches and the nearshore area to the west of the existing channel that may result from realigning the Entrance Channel, Reach 1 up to 150 feet to the west of the existing channel.
- Response- Based upon our analysis, the proposed project would not be expected to cause any significant adverse impacts to adjacent beaches and the nearshore area to the west of the existing channel.

Environmental Effects and Impacts

This proposed action will be in compliance with all environmental laws. A "No Action" alternative was considered in addition to the proposed action. The proposed action meets the USACE Environmental Operating Principles, and minimizes environmental impacts to protected resources to the maximum extent practicable.

- **Determination**

Based on the EA prepared for this project, I have determined that this action does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the action does not require the preparation of a detailed statement under Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.). My determination was made considering the following factors discussed in the EA to which this document is attached:

a. The proposed action may affect not likely to affect leatherback, loggerhead and green sea turtles, north Atlantic right and humpback whales, west Indian manatee, Atlantic and shortnose sturgeon, piping plover, red knot, and seabeach amaranth.

b. No significant cumulative or secondary impacts would result from implementation of this action.

c. The proposed action would not significantly impact cultural resources.

d. The proposed action would result in no significant impacts to air or water quality.

e. The proposed action would result in no significant adverse impact to fish and wildlife resources.

f. The proposed action will not cause any environmental health risks or safety risks that may disproportionately affect children and complies with Executive Order 13045, "Protection of Children from Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks."
FONSI-3

g. The proposed action will not cause any disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority populations and low-income populations and complies with Executive Order 12898, "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations."

- **Findings and Conclusions**

The proposed action to implement the Wilmington Harbor Navigation Improvements Recommended Plan would result in no significant environmental impacts.

Date: 10 OCT 2018

Robert J. Clark
Colonel, U.S. Army
District Commander

FINAL INTEGRATED FEASIBILITY REPORT AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

WILMINGTON HARBOR NAVIGATION IMPROVEMENTS

October 2018

US Army Corps of Engineers
Wilmington District

Executive Summary

The Wilmington Harbor Navigation Improvements Study is being conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Wilmington District (USACE) as a partial response to the Resolution of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Docket 2755, dated June 28, 2006.

Wilmington Harbor is an approximately 38 mile navigation channel which begins at the outer ocean bar at the mouth of the Cape Fear River in Brunswick County, NC, and extends up to the City of Wilmington in New Hanover County, NC, where it services the Port of Wilmington. The Port is a major contributor to the economic activity of both counties, moving about 3.5 million tons and $6.4 billion in goods in 2010, and providing $500 million in sales, property, and corporate and personal taxes. Commodities include bulk cargo and containers, with both imports and exports well-represented.

Problems associated with current channel width and alignment affecting navigation efficiency and ship safety were identified by the Port of Wilmington and users of the channel in three areas of Wilmington Harbor 1) the Entrance Channel 2) the Battery Island Turn, and 3) the Anchorage Basin, which is also used as a turning basin. These inefficiencies can result in vessel delays and the associated economic losses. Therefore, the goal of this study is to increase National Economic Development (NED) benefits at Wilmington Harbor by reducing navigation inefficiencies that are causing delays to current and projected future vessels using the harbor. Objectives were created specific to each of the three problem areas and preliminary alternatives were developed to address the stated problems. These measures underwent an initial screening process based on their viability and practicality, potential environmental impacts, and a rough order of magnitude cost and benefit evaluation. Three measures, as well as the No Action Alternative, were carried forward. These measures underwent additional engineering analysis to form the final array of alternatives. They include the re-alignment of the Entrance Channel, Reach 1, the widening of the existing Battery Island Turn (Channel), the widening of the existing Anchorage Basin and the No Action Alternative.

The System of Accounts defined by the Principles and Guidelines (para. 1.6.2(c)) was used to compare alternatives. The plans were further compared with the planning opportunities and four formulation criteria suggested by the U.S. Water Resources Council. The criteria are completeness, effectiveness, efficiency, and acceptability. The NED Plan was identified as only Alternative 2: the Battery Island Turn, with a benefit-cost ratio of 2.0 to 1. However, the Recommended Plan combines both Alternative 1 and 2. In this plan, Alternative 1, the re-alignment of the Entrance Channel, Reach 1, is only a one-time cost savings and thus is not part of the NED plan. Widening the Anchorage Basin was not recommended due to minimal benefits (Benefit-to-Cost Ratio of less than 1.0 to 1).

The Recommended Plan will realign the Entrance Channel, Reach 1 up to 150 feet to the west of the existing channel, away from the shoal that forms on the east side of the channel. This will result in a onetime reduction in volume dredged during the next regular Operations and Maintenance (O&M) cycle of the Wilmington Harbor ‘96 Act, NC Project. The realignment will not reduce the littoral sediment flow into the channel or the rate at which the channel will shoal.

The Recommended Plan will also widen the Battery Island Channel from 500 feet to 750 feet, provide a 750-feet wide by about 1,300-feet long cutoff between Battery Island and Lower Swash channels, and provide additional tapers where Southport and Lower Swash channels join the widened Battery Island channel. These modifications to the existing channel will increase the available turning radius from ~2,850 feet to ~3,900 feet.

The project first cost for the Recommended Plan is $14,424,000, completely funded with Federal monies. There is no cost associated with the modification to the Entrance Channel, as the cost would be incurred as part of routine O&M costs already associated with channel maintenance. For the first dredging cycle, there would be a one-time cost savings to the Wilmington Harbor '96 Act Project O&M of approximately $2,364,790, as a result of decreased quantities of sediment requiring removal to achieve authorized channel depth. As a result, there is no B/C ratio associated with the Entrance Channel, Reach 1. The Battery Island Turn increment of the Recommended Plan provides over $1.2 million in average annual benefits at an average annual preliminary cost of $631,289 for a B/C ratio of 2.1 to 1. There are no expected negative impacts to the environment or cultural resources resulting from the Recommended Plan, and no additional real estate is required. Further, all Recommended Plan features would be maintained by the Federal government after construction.

It is the recommendation of the Wilmington District that both components be implemented under existing Wilmington Harbor '96 Act, NC authority.

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List of Acronyms

AB	Anchorage Basin
AIWW	Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway
APE	Area of Potential Effect
AST	Aboveground Storage Tank
BI	Battery Island
BH	Bald Head
BOEM	Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
B/C	Benefit/ Cost Ratio
CBRA	Coastal Barrier Resources Act
CBRS	Coastal Barrier Resources System
CCA	Chromated Copper Arsenate
CDF	Confined Disposal Facility
CERCLIS	Comprehensive Environmental Response, Cleanup, Liability Information System
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CY	Cubic Yards
CORRACTS	Corrective Action Sites
CSDR	Coastal Storm Damage Reduction
DMMP	Dredged Material Management Plan
DOI	Department of the Interior
DWT	Dead Weight Tons
EA	Environmental Assessment
EC	Entrance Channel
EFH	Essential Fish Habitat
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ENR	Engineering News Record
EM	Engineer Manual
EQ	Environmental Quality
ESA	Endangered Species Act
FMC	Fishery Management Council
FT	Foot or Feet
FUDS	Formerly Used Defense Site
HAPC	Habitat Areas of Particular Concern
HTRW	Hazardous, Toxic, and Radioactive Waste
IC	Institutional Controls
IDC	Interest During Construction
LPP	Locally Preferred Plan
LUST	Leaking Underground Storage Tank
MAFMC	Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
MANLAA	May Affect Not Likely to Adversely Affect
Mg/l	Milligrams Per Liter
MLLW	Mean Lower-low Water
MLW	Mean Low Water
MMS	Minerals Management Service
MOTSU	Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point
MPRSA	Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act
MSFCMA	Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act

NA	No Action
NC	North Carolina
NCARP	North Carolina Artificial Reef Program
NCDEM	North Carolina Department of Environmental Management
NCDENR	North Carolina Department of Environmental and Natural Resources
NCDWR	North Carolina Division of Water Resources
NCNHP	North Carolina Natural Heritage Program
NCWRC	North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission
NE	No Effect
NED	National Economic Development
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NGVD	National Geodetic Vertical Datum
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
NPL	National Priorities List
NS	Nonstructural
NTU	Nephelometric Turbidity Units
O&M	Operations and Maintenance
ODMDS	Ocean Dredged Material Disposal Site
OPA	Otherwise Protected Area
OSE	Other Social Effects
PCP	Pentachlorophenol
PAH	Polynuclear Aromatic Hyrdocarbon Compounds
PNA	Primary Nursery Areas
PSU	Practical Salinity Units
RCRA	Resource Conservation and Recovery Act
RED	Regional Economic Development
ROM	Rough Order of Magnitude
SAFMC	South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
SAV	Submerged Aquatic Vegetation
SIP	State Implementation Plan
SLC	Sea Level Change
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Risk Informed, Timely
SMP	Sand Management Plan
SNHA	Significant Natural Heritage Area
SWL	Solid Waste Landfill
TBD	To Be Determined
TEU	Twenty Foot Equivalent Units
TOR	Top of Rock
TSP	Tentatively Selected Plan
UST	Underground Storage Tank
USACE	United States Army Corps of Engineers
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
VCP	Voluntary Cleanup Program
WOFES	Wilmington Offshore Fisheries Enhancement Structure

1. STUDY OVERVIEW

This Integrated Feasibility Report and Environmental Assessment (EA) presents the results of the studyto reexamine the feasibility of making navigational improvements at Wilmington Harbor, a deep draft navigation channel serving the Port of Wilmington in North Carolina. The Integrated Feasibility Report and EA comply with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Wilmington Harbor is shown in Figure 1.1. The non-Federal sponsor for this project is the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (formerly North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources (NCDENR). The non-Federal sponsor and USACE executed a feasibility cost sharing agreement (FCSA) for this feasibility study.

1.1 Study Authority

This study is being conducted as a partial response to the Resolution of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Docket 2755, dated June 28, 2006, which reads as follows:

> *Resolved by the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the United States House of Representatives, that the Secretary of the Army is requested to review the report of the Chief of Engineers on Cape Fear – Northeast (Cape Fear) River, published as House Document 164, 105th Congress, and other pertinent reports to determine whether any modifications of the recommendations contained therein are advisable in the interest of navigation improvements and associated water resource development opportunities for Wilmington Harbor, North Carolina.*

1.2 Study Area

The study area includes Wilmington Harbor, the Eagle Island dredged material disposal site, the Wilmington Ocean Dredged Material Disposal Site (ODMDS), and the surrounding affected environment (Figure 1.1). Wilmington Harbor is an approximately 38 mile navigation channel which begins at the outer ocean bar at the mouth of the Cape Fear River in Brunswick County, NC, and extends upriver to the City of Wilmington in New Hanover County, NC, where it services the Port of Wilmington. A full description of the Port of Wilmington is contained in the Economics Appendix (A) of this report. The Port is a major contributor to the economic activity of both counties, moving about 3.5 million tons and $6.4 billion in goods in 2010, and providing $500 million in sales, property, corporate and personal taxes.

(http://files.www.ncmaritimestudy.com/outreach/NC_Maritime_Strategy_working_draft_2012-02-15.pdf)

Commodities include bulk cargo and containers, with imports and exports both well-represented. The authorized depth of the channel is 44 feet Mean Lower Low Water (MLLW) at the ocean bar and entrance channel, then 42 feet for the channel up to the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge. In the last couple miles of the project, upstream of the bridge, the authorized depth decreases to 38 feet and then 27 feet. The initial portion of this final upstream segment is the only part of the channel that has not been constructed (dredged) to the authorized depth, due to lack of multiple users; the constructed depth of this part of

the channel is 34 feet MLLW. Channel widths outside of the Anchorage Basin range from 200 feet at the north end of the project, to 900 feet at the entrance channel. The Anchorage Basin currently has a maximum width of 1,200 feet (see Figure 1.1). The Anchorage Basin is currently being proposed by the Port to be increased by 200 feet in width adjacent to the Vopak terminal (see Figure 5.3).

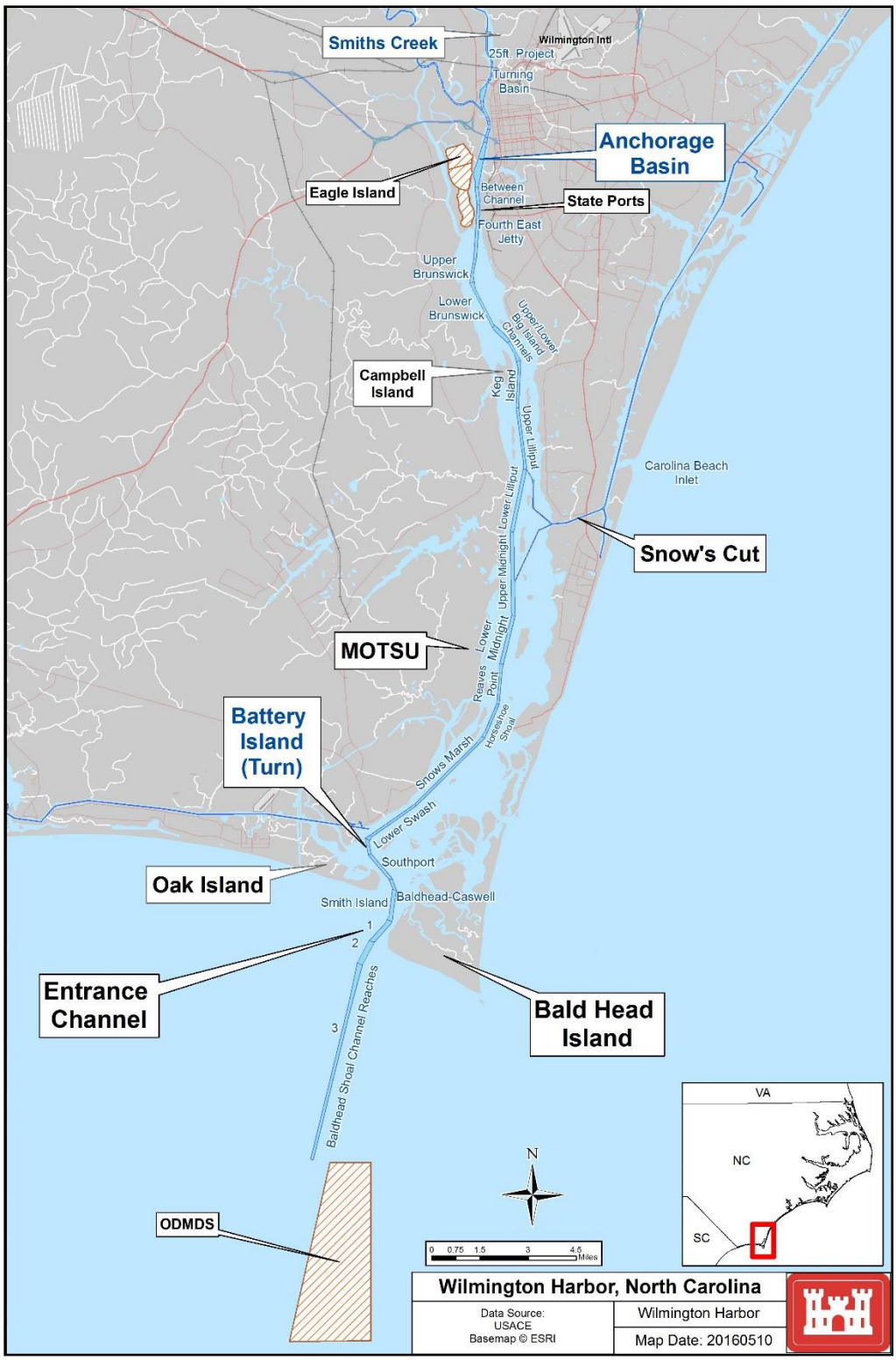


Figure 1.1. Study Area Map

1.3 Study Purpose and Need

Deep draft navigation channel improvements are needed to achieve economic efficiencies and safety for vessels currently calling and projected to call on the Port. Three problem areas for improvement were identified and are addressed in this study: Reach 1 of the Entrance Channel, Battery Island Turn, and the Anchorage Basin (Figure 1.1).

1.4 Scope of Study

This study consists of the analysis of measures and alternatives to select the plan with the highest net National Economic Development (NED) benefits for deep draft navigation improvements at Wilmington Harbor that is consistent with protecting the nation's environment, or otherwise determine that no plan of improvement is justified under current planning criteria and policies. The study focuses on improvements at three specific areas of Wilmington Harbor: the Entrance Channel, Reach 1 located near Bald Head Island, the Battery Island Turn, and the Anchorage Basin at Wilmington. These areas are discussed in more detail later in this report.

1.5 Design Vessel

The term "Design Vessel" refers to the largest vessel considered likely to call at the Port of Wilmington on a regular basis. In order for the Port to operate safely and efficiently, channel dimensions must accommodate this vessel with adequate clearances. In considering the plan for the improvement to the Wilmington Harbor channel, a vessel 965 feet in length, with a beam of 106 feet and a draft of 38-40 feet was considered; this is the same design vessel used in the Wilmington Harbor '96 Act Project.

1.6 Study Process

The USACE studies for water and related land resources follow detailed guidance provided in the Planning Guidance Notebook (Engineer Regulation 1105-2-100). This guidance is based on the Economic and Environmental Principles and Guidelines for Water and Related Land Resources Implementation Studies that were developed pursuant to section 103 of the Water Resources Planning Act (P.L. 89-80) and Executive Order 11747, which were approved by the U.S. Water Resources Council in 1982 and by the President in 1983. A defined six-step process is used to identify and respond to problems and opportunities associated with the Federal objective and specific state and local concerns. The six steps are as follows:

Step 1: Identify Problems and Opportunities

Step 2: Inventory and Forecast Conditions

Step 3: Formulate Alternative Plans

Step 4: Evaluate Alternative Plans

Step 5: Compare Alternative Plans

Step 6: Select Recommended Plan

The process involves an orderly and systematic approach to making evaluations and decisions at each step so that the public and the decision makers can be informed of basic assumptions made, the data and information analyzed, risk and uncertainty, the reasons and rationales used, and the significant implications of each alternative plan. The process concludes with the selection of a Recommended Plan. Specific aspects of the process are described in more detail in other sections of this document.

This study is being conducted utilizing the USACE SMART Planning principles and process (http://planning.usace.army.mil/toolbox/smart.cfm).

1.7 Prior Studies and Reports

The USACE has conducted a number of prior studies in the Wilmington Harbor area, and has prepared numerous supporting engineering, economic, and environmental reports. Some of the more pertinent reports are listed below:

Wilmington Harbor, Northeast Cape Fear River, General Design Memorandum, Wilmington, District, April 1990. Improvements recommended in this design memorandum were authorized by the Water Resources Development Act of 1986 (P.L. 99-662). The General Design Memorandum recommended widening the Fourth East Jetty Channel on the Cape Fear River from the width of 400 feet to a width of 500 feet, and deepening a portion of the project on the Northeast Cape Fear River from the depths of 32 and 25 feet to 38 feet.

Wilmington Harbor Ocean Bar – General Design Memorandum, Supplement and Environmental Assessment, Wilmington District, September 1993. This report recommended removal of rock in the Wilmington Harbor Ocean Bar (Baldhead Shoal) Channel. The authorized, 40-ft depth was not achieved at the time of project construction (1973).

Final Feasibility Report and Environmental Impact Statement on Improvement of Navigation, Cape Fear – Northeast Cape Fear Rivers Comprehensive Study, Wilmington, North Carolina, June 1996. This report was prepared in final response to a resolution adopted 8 September 1988 by the United States House of Representatives, which directed that the existing Federal project for Wilmington Harbor be reviewed and improvements considered.

Environmental Assessment, Preconstruction Modifications of Authorized Improvements, Wilmington Harbor, North Carolina, February 2000. This EA addressed preconstruction modifications to harbor improvements including Ocean

Bar Channel realignment, disposal of dredged sand onto area beaches, rock blasting without air curtains, and a comprehensive dredging and disposal plan. Appendix A of the 2000 EA was a Sand Management Plan (EA SMP), which addressed disposal issues associated with the Wilmington Harbor Entrance Channel.

Section 905(b) Analysis, Wilmington Harbor Navigation Improvements, New Hanover and Brunswick Counties, North Carolina. This 905(b) (reconnaissance) report was approved by the USACE South Atlantic Division in April 2011, and identifies the federal interest in pursuing this current feasibility study.

These reports, as well as several others, can be accessed from the Wilmington District website, at http://www.saw.usace.army.mil/Missions/Navigation/Dredging/Wilmington-Harbor/.

1.8 Environmental Operating Principles

The USACE Environmental Operating Principles (EOP) were developed to ensure that USACE's missions include totally integrated sustainable environmental practices. The Principles provide corporate direction to ensure the workforce recognized the USACE's role in, and responsibility for, sustainable use, stewardship, and restoration of natural resources across the Nation and, through the international reach of its support missions. More information on the USACE Environmental Operating Principles can be found at: http://www.usace.army.mil/Mission/Environmental/EnvironmentalOperating Principles.aspx.

The Wilmington District is committed to implementing the USACE environmental operating principles. Specifically during the planning process, the project considered the sustainability of both the existing deep-draft navigation project in Wilmington and the natural resources located within and around the channel. The project PDT worked closely with environmental agencies, both State and Federal, to review proposed project requirements and how those requirements may impact the environment and ways to reduce potential impact. The USACE considered cumulative impacts in its assessment of the ecological and social value of resources that the project may impact. The project features were designed recognizing the present and expected future status of specific environmental resources, how those resources function in the estuary, and how those resources are influenced by man's activities.

1.9 Existing Federal Projects

The Wilmington Harbor Navigation Channel is a Federally-authorized and maintained navigation channel. Table 1.1 shows the authorized and currently maintained dimensions of the channel.

Table 1.1. Dimensions of Wilmington Harbor Navigation Channel.

Channel Name From Ocean to Upstream	Channel Length (ft)	Channel Width (ft)	Width[1] at Turning Basin	Maintained Channel Depth[2, 3] (ft)	Authorized Channel Depth + Overdepth
Baldhead Shoal Reach 3	26,658	500 - 900		44	46
Baldhead Shoal Reach 2	4,342	900		44	46
Baldhead Shoal Reach 1	4,500	700 - 785		44	46
Smith Island	5,100	650		44	46
Baldhead-Caswell	1,921	500		44	46
Southport	5,363	500		44	46
Battery Island	2,589	500		44	46
Lower Swash	9,789	400		42	44
Snows Marsh	15,775	400		42	44
Horseshoe Shoal	6,102	400		42	44
Reaves Point	6,531	400		42	44
Lower Midnight[4]	8,241	600		42	44
Upper Midnight[4]	13,736	600		42	44
Lower Lilliput[4]	10,825	600		42	44
Upper Lilliput	10,217	400		42	44
Keg Island	7,726	400		42	44
Lower Big Island	3,616	400		42	44
Upper Big Island	3,533	510 - 700		42	44
Lower Brunswick	8,161	400		42	44
Upper Brunswick	4,079	400		42	44
Fourth East Jetty	8,852	500		42	44
Between	2,827	400		42	44
Anchorage Basin Station 8+00 to 84+81	7,681	550 – 1,200	1,200	42	44
Anchorage Basin Station 0+00 to 8+00	3,970	450 - 550		38	44
Memorial Bridge – Isabel Holmes Bridge	9,573	400	850	32	40
Isabel Holmes Bridge - Hilton RR Bridge	2,559	200 - 300		32	40
Hilton RR Br. - Project Limit	6,718	200	700	25	36
Total Length in Feet	200,984				
Total Length in Miles	38.1				

[1] Width shown is widest point at basins, and includes the channel width.
[2] Channel depths are at mean lower low water.
[3] Allowable Overdepth is two feet
[4] This channel reach included the Passing Lane

2.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Although this study is focused on limited areas of Wilmington Harbor, the discussion of the affected environment presented in this Section includes the entirety of Wilmington Harbor (Figure 1.1) and the surrounding area. The existing conditions of significant marine and terrestrial resources of the area are described below.

2.1 Sediments and Erosion

Sediments

Riverine: Sediments of the Wilmington Harbor generally consist of sands, silts, and clays occurring in various mixtures. From the Lower Midnight Channel upstream, the sediments are predominantly silts and clay, and from Reaves Point Channel downstream are predominantly sand, except for the outer Baldhead Shoal Channel which is predominantly silts and clays (Figure 1.1). Occasionally, gravel, shell fragments, limestone fragments, and organic material may also be present. Historically, the silt and clay dredged material has been placed in diked upland disposal areas, or placed in the EPA-designated Wilmington ODMDS. Sandy materials from the lower harbor are normally placed on nearby beaches. On average, about 2.5 million cubic yards (cy) of sediment are removed annually from Wilmington Harbor navigation channel.

The sediments overlie carbonate rocks having different degrees of cementation and hardness. Rock formations that occur in this area, from youngest to oldest, include thin layers tentatively-identified as the Waccamaw Formation and the Trent Formation, the extensive Castle Hayne Limestone, and the Peedee Formation. While all these strata are not generally present at any single location, they are represented within the harbor area. The Castle Hayne Limestone is one of the regional groundwater sources for southeastern North Carolina.

The depth of the top of the rock (TOR) varies depending upon the location. Inside the authorized USACE navigation channel (the Anchorage Basin range), the approximate TOR ranges from elevations -44.0 to -55.8 feet MLLW. The assumed TOR values outside of the authorized USACE navigation channel (between the east side of Eagle Island and the west side of the Anchorage Basin range) range from elevations -16.1 to -50.9 feet MLLW.

Littoral: The active beach profile, or portion of the nearshore ocean bottom affected by wave action, is comprised of sediments that consist of fine to medium quartz sand, shell hash, silt, and clay. The silt/clay component of the active profile ranges from about 2% to 5% down to about -24 feet NGVD. The predominantly mud bottom seaward of the littoral zone provides valuable habitat for shrimp, which support an important fishery in these waters.

Erosion

Naturally-occurring erosion is present along Bald Head Island and Oak Island/Caswell beaches. Shoaling patterns in the navigation channel reveal that sediment depositing within the Baldhead Shoal Channel Reaches 1 & 2, nearest to Bald Head Island, predominantly derives from that island. Likewise, the shoaling within the Smith Island Range predominantly comes from Jay Bird Shoals with its primary source being the Oak Island/Caswell Beaches (USACE 2011). In essence, these two littoral systems can be thought of as largely independent. Furthermore, the shoaling quantities, as measured, are

comparable to those originally estimated by the EA SMP (2000), being on the order of 1.0 million cubic yards every two years.

2.2 Water Resources

Hydrology

Tides in the area are semidiurnal and the mean tidal range varies from about 4.9 feet at Bald Head Island to about one foot as far upstream as Lock & Dam 1, which is located about 65 miles above the river mouth. Regular reversals of flow occur with each tidal cycle except during periods of high freshwater flow. The salinity of the area varies due to many factors including freshwater inflow, tidal action, and wind. Salinity may range from fresh (zero practical salinity units (psu)) in the upper harbor to seawater (35 psu) in the lower river and nearshore ocean. A psu is a measure of salt content, similar to parts per thousand, based on electrical conductivity. The daily average discharge of the Cape Fear River at its mouth is about 9,500 cubic feet per second (cfs).

Prior to the deepening of Wilmington Harbor (2000-2006), there was concern that deepening (by an average of 4 feet) could increase the tidal range and salinity near Wilmington and upstream (USACE 2000). Because of this issue, a 10-year monitoring plan was implemented and included pre-, during, and post-dredging monitoring. The results indicated no apparent difference in tidal range or salinity as a result of the deepening (USACE 2011).

Water Quality

Three State of North Carolina water quality classifications apply to the waters of Wilmington Harbor. The Cape Fear River from the mouth of the Northeast Cape Fear River downstream to a line across the river from Snows Point to Federal Point is classified as "SC"; from this line downstream to the Atlantic Ocean is "SA" (except for an area in the vicinity of Southport that is classified "SC"); and waters of the Atlantic Ocean in the vicinity of the Cape Fear River mouth are classified "SB". "SC" waters are suitable for fishing, fish and wildlife propagation, secondary recreation, and other uses requiring water of lower quality. "SB" waters are suitable for primary recreation in addition to "SC" uses. "SA" waters are suitable for shellfishing for market purposes, as well as "SB" and "SC" uses (15 NC Administrative Code 2B .0311).

According to the N.C. Division of Water Quality's (now the N.C. Division of Water Resources) latest ambient monitoring report for the Cape Fear River (NCDWQ 2009), the water quality in Wilmington Harbor generally meets state standards. However, occasionally near the mouth of the Brunswick River (Cape Fear River Channel Markers 54, 56, and 61), dissolved oxygen values are below 5 mg/l and pH values are below 6.8.

Groundwater

In the Wilmington Harbor vicinity, groundwater is supplied primarily by two aquifers. In descending order of elevation, they are the water table aquifer of the undifferentiated surficial sands and the Castle Hayne Limestone. Most domestic water wells are set in the surficial sands. Locally, vertical groundwater movement may occur downward through the surficial sand to the Castle Hayne Limestone. Regionally, the horizontal groundwater movement is eastward with some southeast movement. The resultant groundwater movement is toward the coast.

2.3 Air Quality

The Wilmington Regional Office of the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality has air quality jurisdiction for the project area. New Hanover County and Brunswick County are in "attainment" for all criteria pollutants (Newland per comm. May 22, 2012) and (http://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/air-quality/air-quality-planning/attainment).

2.4 Marine and Estuarine Resources

Nekton

Nekton collectively refers to aquatic organisms capable of controlling their location through active movement rather than depending upon water currents or gravity for passive movement. Nekton of the nearshore Atlantic Ocean along southeastern North Carolina can be grouped into three categories: estuarine dependent species; permanent resident species; and seasonal migrant species. The most abundant nekton of these waters is the estuarine dependent species which inhabit the estuary as larvae and the ocean as juveniles or adults. This group includes species which spawn offshore, such as the Atlantic croaker (*Micropogon undulatus*), spot (*Leiostomus xanthurus*), Atlantic menhaden (*Brevoortia tyrannus*), star drum (Stellifer lanceolatus), southern kingfish (Menticirrhus americanus), flounders (*Paralichthys* spp.), mullets (*Mugil* spp.), anchovies (*Anchoa* spp.), blue crab (*Callinectes sapi*dus), and penaeid shrimp (*Penaeus* spp.), as well as species which spawn in the estuary, such as red drum (*Sciaenops ocellatus*) and weakfish (*Cynoscion regalis*). Species which are permanent residents of the nearshore marine waters include the black sea bass (*Centropristis striata*), longspine porgy (*Stenotomus caprinus*), Atlantic bumper (*Chloroscombrus chrysurus*), inshore lizardfish (*Synodus foetens*), and searobins (*Prionotus* spp.). Common warm water migrant species include the bluefish (*Pomatomus saltatrix*), Spanish mackerel (*Scomberomorus maculatus*), king mackerel (*Scomberomorus cavalla*), cobia (*Rachycentron canadum*), Florida pompano (*Trachinotus carolinus*), and spiny dogfish (*Squalus acanthias*).

The surf zone along the area beaches provides important fishery habitat. Surf zone fisheries are typically diverse, and 52 species have been identified from North Carolina (Ross 1996, Ross and Lancaster 1996, Hackney et al. 1996). Some species may be dependent upon surf zone habitat. Studies indicate that juveniles of certain species may have high site fidelity and extended residence time in the surf zone suggesting its function as a nursery area (Ross and Lancaster 1996). Two species in particular, the Florida pompano and gulf kingfish (*Menticirrhus littoralis*) seem to use the surf zone exclusively as a juvenile nursery area.

Anadromous species such as blueback herring (*Alosa aestivalis*), American shad (*Alosa sapidissima*), hickory shad (*Alosa mediocris*), alewife (*Alosa pseudoharengus*), striped bass (*Morone saxatilis*), the endangered Atlantic sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrhynchus*), and the endangered shortnose sturgeon (*Acipenser brevirostrum*), pass through the nearshore ocean and Cape Fear estuary en route to upper river spawning and nursery areas (Walburg and Nichols 1967, Nichols and Louder 1970, Moser and Ross 1993). Anadromous fish use is highest from mid-winter to mid-spring. The catadromous American eel (*Anguilla rostrata*), is widely distributed in the Cape Fear River estuary and migrates through the area of the bar channel (Schwartz et al. 1981).

Marine mammals also occur in North Carolina's coastal waters. The Federally-endangered right whale (*Eubaleana glacialis*) and humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) are spring and fall migrants off the coast; and the right whale often occurs in shallow water. The National Marine Fisheries Services' (NMFS) designated critical habitat for right whales was increased to include the mouth of the Cape Fear River as of February 2016. A number of other whale and dolphin species normally inhabit deeper waters offshore, while the bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) and the harbor porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) utilize nearshore waters. The bottlenose dolphin is common in the project area. The Federally-endangered manatee (*Trichechus manatus*) is a rare visitor; however, several sightings have been documented in the project area.

Three species of sea turtles are known to nest on the beaches of North Carolina near the mouth of the Cape Fear River and also, occasionally, enter the lower Cape Fear estuary. These include the Federally-endangered leatherback sea turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) and the Federally-threatened green (*Chelonia mydas*) and loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*) sea turtles. These are discussed in Section 2.8, Threatened and Endangered Species.

Eight artificial reefs that provide habitat for fish, are located off Brunswick County. These reefs are managed by the State of North Carolina Artificial Reef Program (NCARP). Six of these reefs occur within about 15 miles of the existing Baldhead Shoal Channel. However, all of these sites are located between one and 10 miles offshore and are in water about 30 to 53 feet deep. None are in proximity to the proposed work.

Primary Nursery Areas

The State of North Carolina defines Primary Nursery Areas (PNAs) as tidal saltwaters that provide essential habitat for the early development of commercially important fish and shellfish. It is in these estuarine areas that many fish species undergo initial post-larval development. Primary Nursery Areas are designated by the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission. Neither the ocean bar channel nor the navigation channel near Southport are located within a designated PNA (15A NCAC 03B .1405). Within the Cape Fear River portion of the harbor, PNAs occur from Upper Lilliput Channel upstream to the end of the project. They are located from the shoreline to 300 yards outside the harbor channel from Upper Lilliput Channel to Upper Brunswick Channel, inclusive. Upstream from that point, PNAs extend from the river shoreline to the edge of the harbor channel. This is the case adjacent to the existing Anchorage Basin near the State Ports.

Benthos

Aquatic organisms that live in close association with the bottom, or substrate, of a body of water, are collectively called the benthos. Benthic communities of the project area exhibit a wide range of organism composition and density, and community structure may vary considerably depending on substrate type and salinity regime.

Benthic organisms in this area of the nearshore ocean were reported by Birkhead et al. (1979) at densities ranging from about 90 individuals per square meter on sand bottom to over 500 per square meter on mud substrate. This study found the tube dwelling polychaete, *Spiophanes bombyx*, to be the dominant component of the benthos collected from a spot off the eastern end of Oak Island and other locations where substrates were predominantly mud or mud-sand mixtures. Other dominants reported from this marine area included several

polychaete worms (*Magelona* sp., *Heteromastus filiformis*, and *Paraprionospio pinnata*); the sea pansy (*Renilla reniformis*); and an unidentified brittlestar (amphiurid). Additional taxa reported in high numbers included the sand dollar (*Mellita quinquiesperforata*) and other polychaete worms (*Diopatra cuprea* and *Nephtys picta*). Similar findings were reported by Versar, Inc (2002).

Lawler, Matusky & Skelly Engineers (1975) conducted a benthic investigation at six stations ranging from near the mouth of the Cape Fear River up to the mouth of Smith Creek in the Northeast Cape Fear River. Polychaetes dominated the benthic fauna below Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point (MOTSU) (Figure 1.1). Of the 21 species collected, only five species occurred above Lower Lilliput channel and only one species at Smith Creek. Species included *Scolecolepides virdis, Capitella capitata, Branchioasylis americana, Drilonerea longa* and *Nerea succinea*. Oligochaetes were the most abundant group in the entire river, comprising 35% of all collected fauna. They were most abundant from Campbell Island upstream to the Anchorage Basin. Amphipods (*Gammarus* spp.) occurred in all samples but were most abundant near MOTSU, the Anchorage Basin and at Smith Creek. Other common species collected were Cumaceans and Isopods. Similar results were found by Ray (1996).

The NC Division of Environmental Management performed benthic sampling at Snows Marsh in 1985. Of the 38 species collected, polychaetes, molluscs, amphipods, and decapods dominated the site (NCDEM unpublished data). Sediments ranged from coarse sand to fine silty clays. Common species collected were polychaete worms (*Leitoscoloplos variabilis* and *Paraprionospio pinnata*) and molluscs (*Ilyanassa obsoleta* and *Crassostrea virginica).*

Shellfish beds are present in the Cape Fear Estuary, primarily south of Snows Cut (Woodward-Clyde Consultants 1980). All significant beds are in shallow water east of the navigation channel. The dominant species are the eastern oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*) and the clam (*Mercenaria mercenaria*).

Intertidal Macrofauna

Intertidal portions of ocean beaches are inhabited by a number of invertebrate species which are ecologically important. These include mole crabs (*Emerita talpoida*) and coquina clams (*Donax* spp.), as well as various species of polychaete worms and amphipods. Mole crabs and coquinas represent the largest component of the total macrofaunal biomass of North Carolina intertidal beaches, and they are consumed in large numbers by important fish species such as flounders, pompanos, mullets, and kingfish (Reilly and Bellis, 1978, Hackney et al. 1996, Versar 2002). Beach intertidal macrofauna are also a seasonally important food source for numerous shorebird species. Abundance of intertidal macrofauna can be influenced by man's alteration of the beach environment through activities such as (1) beach scraping and dune shaping with heavy equipment and (2) beach placement of dredged sand.

2.5 Essential Fish Habitat and State Managed Fish Species

Table 2.1 lists, by life stages, fish species which may occur in the vicinity of Wilmington Harbor, and for which Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) have been developed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC), Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC), and NMFS. These fish species and habitats require special consideration to promote their viability and sustainability.

Table 2.1. Essential Fish Habitat species in the Wilmington Harbor

Common Name	Scientific Name	Life Stage
INVERTEBRATES		
Brown shrimp	*Farfantepenaeus aztecus*	LJA
White shrimp	*Litopenaeus setiferus*	LJA
Pink shrimp	*Farfantepenaeus duorarum*	LJA
COASTAL DEMERSALS		
Red drum	*Sciaenops ocellatus*	ELJA
Bluefish	*Pomatomus saltatrix*	JA
Summer flounder	*Paralichthys dentatus*	LJA
COASTAL PELAGICS		
Spanish mackerel	*Scomberomorus maculatus*	JA
King mackerel	*Scomberomorus cavalla*	JA
Cobia	*Rachycentron canadum*	JA
SNAPPERS/GROUPERS		
Black sea bass	*Centropristis striata*	J
Rock sea bass	*Centropristis philadelphica*	J
Gag grouper	*Mycteroperca microlepis*	J
Red grouper	*Epinephelus morio*	J
Black grouper	*Mycteroperca bonaci*	J
Lane snapper	*Lutjanus synagris*	J
Mutton snapper	*Lutjanus analis*	J
Gray snapper	*Lutjanus griseus*	J
Yellow jack	*Carangoides bartholomaei*	J
Blue runner	*Caranx crysos*	J
Crevalle jack	*Caranx hippos*	J
Bar jack	*Caranx ruber*	J
Atlantic spadefish	*Chaetodipterus faber*	J
Sheepshead	*Archosargus probatocephalu*	JA
SHARKS		
Smooth dogfish	*Mustelus canis*	J
SMALL COASTAL SHARKS		
Atlantic sharpnose shark	*Rhizoprionodon terraenovae*	JA
Finetooth shark	*Carcharhinus isodon*	JA
Blacknose shark	*Carcharhinus acronotus*	JA
Bonnethead shark	*Sphyrna tiburo*	JA
LARGE COASTAL SHARKS		
Silky shark	*Carcharhinus falciformis*	JA
Tiger shark	*Galeocerdo cuvieri*	JA
Blacktip shark	*Carcharhinus limbatus*	JA
Spinner shark	*Carcharhinus brevipinna*	JA
Bull shark	*Carcharhinus leucas*	JA
Lemon shark	*Negaprion brevirostris*	JA
Nurse shark	*Ginglymostoma cirratum*	JA
Scalloped hammerhead	*Sphyrna lewini*	JA
Great hammerhead	*Sphyrna mokarran*	JA
Smooth hammerhead	*Sphyrna zygaena*	JA

Legend: E, Egg; L, Larval; J, Juvenile; A, Adult
Source: Habitat Protection Division, Pivers Island, NC

Table 2.2 list categories of EFH and Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC) for managed species that were identified in the FMP Amendments affecting the South Atlantic area. HAPC's are subsets of EFH which are rare, particularly susceptible to human-induced degradation, especially ecologically important, or located in an environmentally stressed area. No HAPCs are located in the vicinity of Wilmington Harbor. The EFH categories in Wilmington Harbor are indicated by an * in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2. Categories of EFH and HAPC identified in FMP Amendments affecting the South Atlantic.

EFH	GEOGRAPHICALLY DEFINED HAPC
Estuarine Areas	**Area-wide**
Estuarine Emergent Wetlands*	Council-designated Artificial Reef Special Management Zones
Estuarine Scrub/Shrub Mangroves	Hermatypic (reef-forming) Coral Habitat & Reefs
Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV)	Hard Bottoms
Oyster Reefs & Shell Banks*	Hoyt Hills
Intertidal Flats*	*Sargassum* Habitat
Palustrine Emergent & Forested Wetlands	State-designated Areas of Importance for Managed Species
Aquatic Beds	Submerged Aquatic Vegetation
Estuarine Water Column*	
Seagrass	
Creeks	
Mud Bottom	
Marine Areas	**North Carolina**
Live/Hard Bottoms	Big Rock
Coral and Coral Reefs	Bogue Sound
Artificial/Man-made Reefs	Pamlico Sound at Hatteras/Ocracoke Islands
Sargassum	Capes Fear, Lookout, & Hatteras (sandy shoals)
Water Column*	New River
	The Ten Fathom Ledge
	The Point

In addition, the State of North Carolina has prepared Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) for several fish species that utilize resources within the study area. These species include striped mullet, spotted trout, southern flounder, sea mullet (kingfish) (3 species), striped bass, and red drum. All of these species use the study area during a portion of their life cycle.

2.6 Terrestrial Resources

Terrestrial areas that may be influenced by the new proposed actions include the Eagle Island Confined Disposal Facility (CDF), Battery, Ferry Slip, South Pelican, and Striking Islands, and ocean beaches of Bald Head Island and Oak Island/Caswell Beach (Figure 2.1).

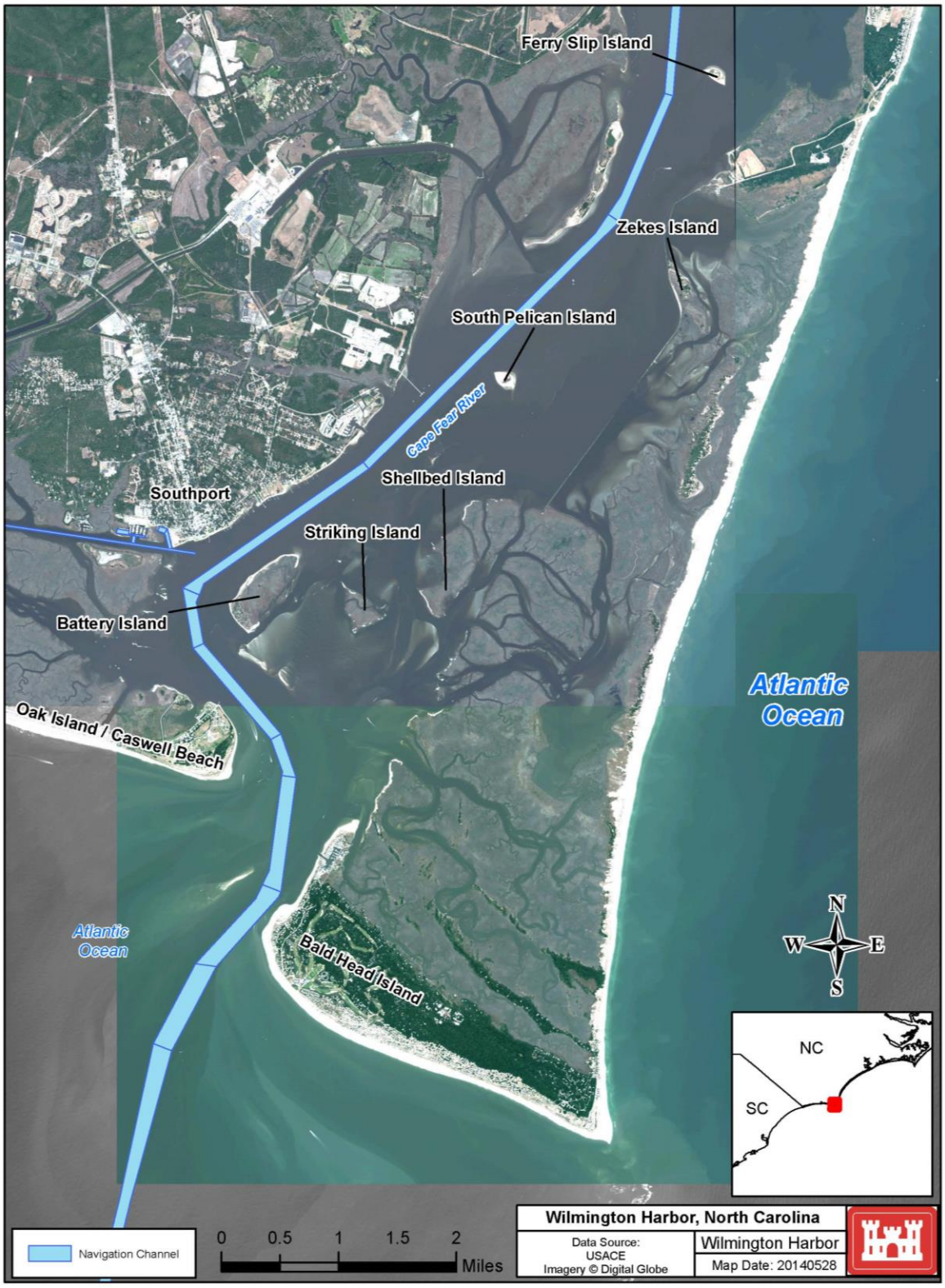


Figure 2.1 Lower Wilmington Harbor.

The Eagle Island CDF (Figure 1.1), located across the river from downtown Wilmington, is the largest existing upland placement site for Wilmington Harbor. The portion used for placement is approximately 880 acres and is dominated by a monoculture of common reed (*Phragmites australis*). This portion has marginal value to wildlife, but surrounding areas with tree and shrub cover provide important habitat for small mammals and songbirds. Linear borrow pits along the dike interior provide fresh water during most of the year, and are utilized by waterfowl, migrating shorebirds, and alligators. Along the Cape Fear and Brunswick Rivers, mixed marsh and expanses of smooth cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) are common.

Battery Island is a natural island along the Cape Fear River near Southport. The location provides nesting habitat for wading birds in the red cedars (*Juniperus virginiana*), yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*), and other shrubs on the island. Battery Island supports North Carolina's largest colony of wading birds, including approximately 10% of North America's White Ibises. The riverside beachfront provides nesting habitat for American Oystercatchers (*Haematopus palliatus*), and the grassy uplands support nesting for willets (*Catoptrophorus* sp.). The island is managed by the Audubon Society and is posted and patrolled throughout the nesting season to prevent disturbance to nesting birds. Human disturbance can result in egg or chick loss, nest abandonment, and colony abandonment.

Ferry Slip and South Pelican Islands are small dredged material placement areas in the lower river that are not diked and are also managed by the Audubon Society for colonial nesting waterbirds. The islands are composed of entirely dredged sand and are periodically renourished by the USACE when suitable, beach-quality sand is available. As with Battery Island, these islands are posted and patrolled throughout the nesting season to prevent disturbance to nesting birds. Ferry Slip supports a large colony of Royal (*Thalasseus maximus*) and Sandwich terns (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*), and a small colony of Laughing Gulls (*Leucophaeus atricilla*). The island also supports a significant colony of Brown Pelicans (*Pelecanus occidentalis*).

South Pelican Island is an important nesting site for Royal Terns, Sandwich Terns, and a few Gull-billed Terns (*Gelochelidon nilotica*). An average of 10 to 11 breeding pairs of American Oystercatchers nest there annually. Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*), Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*), and Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) nest on the site in some years. Most of this information on these Audubon Society-managed islands was obtained from their webpage at http://iba.audubon.org.

Striking Island is an important foraging site for wading birds from the nearby Battery Island Audubon Sanctuary. The site supports nesting Laughing Gulls (*Leucophaeus atricilla*), American Oystercatchers, Willets, and Clapper Rails (*Rallus longirostris*). Striking Island is a natural marsh island and consists primarily of intertidal and high saltmarsh with small islands of upland washed oyster shell banks, shrubs and grassy areas. (http://iba.audubon.org.)

Among North Carolina's upland habitats, the beach and dune community could be considered depauperate in both plants and animals. The beach environment is severe due to constant

exposure to salt spray, shifting sands, wind, and sterile soils with low water retention capacity. Common vegetation of the upper beach includes beach spurge (*Euphorbia polygonifolia*), sea rocket (*Cakile edentula*) and pennywort (*Hydrocotyle bonariensis*). The dunes are more heavily vegetated, and common species include American beach grass (*Ammophila breviligulata*), panic grass (*Panicum amarum*) sea oats (*Uniola paniculata*), broom straw (*Andropogon virginicus*) and salt meadow hay (*Spartina patens*).

North Carolina beaches offer valuable habitat for shorebirds, and use by these birds can be extremely heavy during migration periods. However, the value of project area beaches for shorebirds may have declined over time due to continued development, high public use, and man's disturbance through activities such as beach scraping with heavy equipment, which may deplete supplies of intertidal invertebrates that are important food sources for shorebirds. Dunes of the project area support fewer numbers of birds than the beaches but can be very important habitats for resident songbird species and for other species during periods of migration.

2.7 Wetlands and Flood Plains

Coastal wetlands of the vicinity include tidal salt marshes which occur along the shorelines and the island fringes of the lower Cape Fear River. These marshes are comprised mainly of smooth cordgrass and are generally more extensive where they are more protected from wind and wave action. Intertidal wetlands of the area are very important ecologically due to their high primary productivity, their role as nursery areas for larvae and juveniles of many marine species, and their refuge/forage value to wildlife. In addition, they provide aesthetically valuable natural areas. Non-tidal wetlands consisting of monotypic stands of the invasive plant, *Phragmites*, occur within some of the diked island placement areas. Wetlands that may be affected by the proposed project would be found in the vicinity of the Anchorage Basin which is mainly fringed by smooth cordgrass.

2.8 Threatened and Endangered Species

Federal

Updated lists of threatened and endangered (T&E) species for the project area were obtained from the NMFS and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service webpages (http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/protected_resources/section_7/threatened_endangered/Documents/north_carolina.pdf and http://www.fws.gov/raleigh/species/cntylist/nc_counties.html). These were combined to develop the composite list shown in Table 2.3, which includes T&E species that could be present in the area based upon their historical occurrence or potential geographic range. However, the actual occurrence of a species in the area depends upon the availability of suitable habitat, the season of the year relative to a species' temperature tolerance, migratory habits, and other factors.

Table 2.3. Federally listed endangered and threatened species that may be in or near the project area.

MAMMALS		
Blue whale	(*Balaenoptera musculus*)	Endangered
Finback whale	(*Balaenoptera physalus*)	Endangered
Humpback whale	(*Megaptera novaeangliae*)	Endangered
North Atlantic right whale	(*Eubaleana glacialis*)	Endangered
Sei whale	(*Balaenoptera borealis*)	Endangered
West Indian manatee	(*Trichechus manatus*)	Endangered
BIRDS		
Piping plover	(*Charadrius melodus)*	Threatened
Red-cockaded woodpecker	(*Picoides borealis*)	Endangered
Wood stork	(*Mycteria Americana)*	Endangered
Red knot	(Calidris canutus rufa)	Threatened
REPTILES		
Hawksbill sea turtle	(*Eretmochelys imbricata*)	Endangered
Kemp's ridley sea turtle	(*Lepidochelys kempii*)	Endangered
Green sea turtle	(*Chelonia mydas*)	Endangered
Leatherback sea turtle	(*Dermochelys coriacea*)	Endangered
Loggerhead sea turtle	(*Caretta caretta*)	Threatened
FISHES		
Atlantic sturgeon	(*Acipenser oxyrhynchus oxyrhynchus*)	Endangered
Shortnose sturgeon	(*Acipenser brevirostrum*)	Endangered
PLANTS		
American chaffseed	(*Schwalbea americana*)	
Cooley's meadowrue	(*Thalictrum cooleyi*)	Endangered
Golden Sedge	(*Carex lutea*)	Endangered
Rough-leaved loosestrife	(*Lysimachia asperulaefolia*)	Endangered
Pond berry	(*Lindera melissifolia*)	Endangered
Seabeach amaranth	(*Amaranthus pumilus*)	Threatened

State

The North Carolina Natural Heritage Program (NCNHP), by letter dated August 9, 2012 (NCNHP 2012), listed the state rare plant and animal species and natural communities near the project area. These lists included the federal species indicated above. Also, the following information was excerpted from that letter:

The Lower Cape Fear River Aquatic Habitat Significant Natural Heritage Area (SNHA) comprises the active channel of the Cape Fear River from Eagle Island downstream to Bald Head Island and supports populations of two Federally and State Endangered animals: manatee (*Trichechus manatus*) and shortnose sturgeon (*Acipenser brevirostrum*). Also supported is the State Threatened American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*). The site also provides important habitat for other animal species that are rare in North Carolina, including Carolina diamondback terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin centrata*). This portion of the river is considered to be of State significance due to the habitat provided to these rare species.

The shortnose sturgeon occurs in the lower Cape Fear River, swimming well upriver to spawn; its abundance is poorly known, though it is likely a resident in this lower part of the river. The manatee is a rare but possibly annual visitor during the warmer months, from the Florida and West Indies area.

The State Significantly Rare Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*) breeds sporadically in the vicinity of the Anchorage Basin, depending on the availability of some standing water in diked areas of Eagle Island.

The Lower Cape Fear River Bird Nesting Islands SNHA, Brunswick River/Cape Fear River Marshes SNHA, and Battery Island SNHA are also in the vicinity of the proposed project. The Lower Cape Fear River Bird Nesting Islands are mostly dredged material placement islands located within the lower and salty tidal region of the Cape Fear River from Snows Cut to Island near Southport. These islands are one of the most important colonial waterbird nesting areas in North Carolina and provide critical feeding and breeding habitat for many waterbird species, including two special animal habitats: Gull-Tern-Skimmer Colony and Wading Bird Rookery.

The Brunswick River/Cape Fear River Marshes SNHA contains the largest area of tidal freshwater marsh habitat in North Carolina, occurring from the northern portion of Eagle Island and along the south end of the sand ridge traversed by US Highway 421. This site supports shortnose sturgeon and American alligator, the rare skipper (*Problema bulenta*), Dukes' skipper (*Euphyes dukesi*), and contains the only known occurrences of ribbed bishopweed (*Ptilimnium costatum*), and two of only four known North Carolina occurrences of Carolina bishopweed (*Ptilimnium* sp.)

2.9 Cultural Resources

The following section describes the historical setting and cultural, historic, and archaeological resources of the lower Cape Fear River project area within the North Carolina Coastal Plain.

Evidence of Paleo-Indian period (12,000 – 10,000 B.P.) occupation in the Coastal Plain is mostly limited to a small number of surface finds of fluted projectile points (Ward and Davis 1999). While the dearth of evidence suggests the region was sparsely populated, late Pleistocene and early Holocene sea levels were lower than today, and many Paleo-Indian sites are likely miles offshore from the present-day coastline (Lewis 2000, Phelps 1983). Warming trends melted glaciers and produced a rise in sea level to within a few meters of present levels by 9,000 B.P. and reached present sea level ca. 2,000 to 5,000 B.P. (Anderson et al. 1996, Lewis 2000).

The archaeological record of the Archaic period (10,000 – 3,000 B.P.) reflects new technologies and lifestyles as Archaic peoples adapted to climatic and environmental changes and mega-fauna extinctions that occurred during the Paleo-Indian period. Early Archaic sites in the Coastal Plain are mainly surface finds and are also likely inundated by early Holocene sea level rise (Phelps 1983, Ward and Davis 1999).

The Archaic period was an important foundation upon which later, more complex societies would grow during the Woodland period (3,000 B.P. – A.D. 1600). The early Woodland period people, in particular seem to have inhabited the same riverside locations and followed much the same lifestyle as their Archaic period predecessors. Coastal Archaic and Early Woodland period sites and artifact finds appear to be scattered and significant occupations tend to occur during Middle and Late Woodland periods (Ward and Davis 1999). An increasing reliance on horticulture, semi-sedentary villages, and pottery-making becomes more widespread during the Early Woodland period (Ward and Davis 1999).

Coastal, regional cultures begin to appear in the Late Archaic subperiod and into the Early Woodland period as agriculture, large population increase, and more permanent settlements occurred (Phelps 1983). An increased focus on estuarine resources during the Middle and Late Woodland periods is evident by shell middens (Millis 2011). Other cultural features include sand burial mounds, secondary cremations, platform pipes, and large triangular projectile points (Phelps 1983).

Two main tribes, the Cape Fear and Waccamaw, were settled in the southeastern North Carolina coastal area at the time of European contact (A.D. 1600 – 1710) (Jackson 1996). Little is known of these tribes, although they were most likely affiliated with Siouan peoples to the south (Jackson 1996). Cultural traits such as subsistence and settlements patterns do not appear to have changed much from the Late Woodland period during the early contact period (Ward and Davis 1999). Continued contact with European settlers would result in drastic cultural changes for these tribes.

The Cape Fear River has a long and active history as one of the earliest and most significant waterways in North Carolina. Spanish explorers sighted the river at least as early as the first quarter of the 16th century and European settlement began in 1664 with the establishment of Charles Town near the mouth of Town Creek (Angley 1983). Brunswick Town was a significant pre-Colonial settlement that survived for 60 years as the administrative center for North Carolina's five ports of entry (Angley 1983). By 1733, the town of New Carthage, later renamed Wilmington, had been laid out and within a few decades it would outstrip Brunswick Town as a cultural and maritime center (Reaves 1988).

Numerous confrontations took place between the American patriots and British loyalists and troops during the years leading up to the Revolution. Perhaps one of the most significant was

the escape of Royal Governor Josiah Martin from his home in New Bern to Fort Johnston. Local patriots had been harassing Fort Johnston for some time, and Martin was eventually forced from Fort Johnston onto the British vessel Cruizer (Reaves 1988). Despite the success of the patriots, the English remained in control of the Cape Fear, conducting sporadic raids on plantations and mills, with Wilmington itself being occupied by the British in October of 1781 (Reaves 1988).

During the 19th century, up to 40 ships per month were visiting Wilmington's harbor from distant ports such as South America, Norway, and China (Reaves 1988). The importance of Wilmington to the Confederacy is reflected in the fortifications used to protect the city and her approaches (Jackson 1996). Fort Fisher, Fort Holmes, Zekes Island Battery, Camp Wyatt, Fort Hendrick, Fort Campbell, Fort Johnston, Fort Caswell, Battery Buchanan, Fort Anderson, Shaw Battery, Mound Battery, and Battery Lamb were located on the Cape Fear River at and below Wilmington, or faced the ocean and river in Brunswick County. All of these fortifications were important elements in the coastal defense. The defenses at Wilmington were not defeated until late in the war when Fort Fisher finally fell in the largest amphibious assault then known (Angley 1983, Reaves 1988).

After the Civil War, Wilmington's major water courses began to reflect the transition from plantation and agrarian economies to the commercial agriculture and industrial enterprises that would dominate throughout the 20th century. By 1905, ship building, fertilizer and brick factories, shipping terminals, and other capital intensive industries began to replace commercial fishing, hunting, forestry, and agriculture as economically dominant businesses (Angley 1983, Reaves 1988).

Archaeologically, the importance of the area as a maritime center is shown by the large number of shipwrecks and abandoned shipyards. Given this importance, numerous historical and archaeological investigations have been conducted and the Cape Fear River from Wilmington to the sea is the best-documented body of water in North Carolina (Overton et al. 1996).

2.10 Aesthetic and Recreational Resources

A scenic setting is provided by the ocean and river, coastal beaches, and the numerous vessels common to these waters, including commercial and recreational boats as well as ships calling on the port. The marine environment provides opportunities for boating and fishing, as well as an escape from the faster pace of land-based activities.

The Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway (AIWW) is collocated with the navigation channel from Snows Cut through Southport and provides recreation access for many boaters and also provides a safe north or south passage for non-oceangoing vessels. Beaches generally offer extensive recreational opportunities for activities such as swimming, sunbathing, walking, surfing, bird watching, and fishing.

2.11 Recreational and Commercial Fishing

Recreational and commercial fishermen extensively utilize the nearshore marine and riverine waters of North Carolina's southeast coast. Primary species sought include red

drum, flounder, trout, spot, croaker, bluefish, Spanish mackerel, king mackerel, penaeid shrimp, and blue crabs. Traditional fishing grounds, primarily for shrimp, occur in the project vicinity off Bald Head Island and Oak Island (Figure 1.1). These areas are of prime importance to the local fishing industry. In addition, sport and commercial fishing is being conducted in the vicinity of a reef-like community that was developed at the Wilmington Offshore Fisheries Enhancement Structure (WOFES), a feature formed by the USACE placement of dredged rock at a location about four miles off Bald Head Island.

2.12 Coastal Barrier Resources System

Coastal barriers are unique landforms that provide protection for diverse aquatic habitats and serve as the mainland's first line of defense against the impacts of coastal storms and erosion.

The Coastal Barrier Resources System (CBRS) consists of the undeveloped coastal barriers and other areas located on the coasts of the United States that are identified and generally depicted on a series of maps entitled “John H. Chafee Coastal Barrier Resources System.” These maps control and dictate which lands are affected by the Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA). The maps are maintained by the Department of the Interior through the Fish and Wildlife Service (http://www.fws.gov/CBRA/index.html).

In the lower Cape Fear River, the Cape Fear Unit NC-07P is present. Maps for this unit can be viewed at http://www.fws.gov/CBRA/Maps/CBRS/index.html. The "P" following the unit number means Otherwise Protected Area (OPA). OPAs are undeveloped coastal barriers that are within the boundaries of an area established under Federal, State, or local law, or held by a qualified organization, primarily for wildlife refuge, sanctuary, recreational, or natural resource conservation purposes. NC-07P includes Carolina Beach State Park, the Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point buffer zone, and Zeke’s Island Coastal Estuarine Reserve. Portions of the existing Wilmington Harbor navigation channel border or lines within NC-07P, but none of the potential placement areas or channel realignment areas for the project are present within the CBRS. Maintenance of federal navigation channels is exempted from CBRA.

2.13 Socio-Economic Resources

Population

North Carolina had an estimated population of 9,535,475 in 2010, an increase of 15.6% since 2000. North Carolina is presently growing about 1.3% annually, and is one of the fastest growing states in the nation.

The project area includes New Hanover and Brunswick counties and had an estimated 2010 population of 310,098 which is an increase of 33% since 2000. While the state is presently growing at 1.3% a year, the two-county area is growing at 2.0% per year. Brunswick County has been among the fastest growing counties in the state, presently growing at 2.5% per year.

Employment

The latest economic data from 2016 indicate that North Carolina has a labor force of about 4,613,000 and unemployed of about 262,210 giving an unemployment rate of 5.4%. As of 2015, New Hanover County had an unemployment rate of 5.3% and Brunswick County had an unemployment rate of 7.1%. The 2014 per capita income was $27,260 for Brunswick county and $29,742 for New Hanover County. The per capita income for the state was $25,608 compared to the national average of $28,555 (http://data.bls.gov).

The 3-county region has a large resort population located along the sounds and beaches. Tourism is one of the largest economic factors in the area, along with retirement and vacation home development. Building along the beaches is beginning to slow. The influx of retired persons is a large component of the population and economic growth of the region.

Wilmington Harbor

Wilmington Harbor and the Port of Wilmington provide significant economic benefits to the region and the nation. The economics of the harbor and Port will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 of this report and Appendix A - Economics.

2.14 Hazardous and Toxic Wastes.

Several Federal and State databases/lists were reviewed as part of this hazardous, toxic, and radioactive waste (HTRW) evaluation and include:

- Federal National Priorities (NPL)
- Federal Delisted NPL
- Federal Comprehensive Environmental Response, Cleanup, Liability Information System (CERCLIS)
- Federal CERCLIS-No Further Remedial Action Planned (NFRAP)
- Federal Resource Conservation Act (RCRA) Corrective Action Sites (CORRACTS)
- Federal RCRA-Generator
- Federal Institutional Controls (IC) and Engineering Controls (EC)
- Formerly Used Defense Site (FUDS)
- State/Tribal Superfund Registry
- State/Tribal Solid Waste Landfill (SWL)
- State/Tribal Underground Storage Tank (UST)/Aboveground Storage Tank (AST)
- State/Tribal Leaking Underground Storage Tank (LUST)
- State/Tribal Voluntary Cleanup Program (VCP)
- State/Tribal IC and EC

- State/Tribal Brownfields
- Tribal Lands

Based on results of the regulatory database review, there is one high priority release site within the study area and it is located near the Anchorage Basin. High priority release sites are those sites where there is no clear indication that the case/release has been closed by regulatory agency. Not included in high priority sites are those sites where the regulatory agency has not closed the case if the reported or suspected amount of material(s) release was less than 100 gallons.

The high priority site is the Southern Wood Piedmont Company site at the foot of Greenfield Street. The site was operated as a wood-treating facility from 1935 to 1983. Wood-treating products used on site included pentachlorophenol (PCP), chromated copper arsenate (CCA), and creosote. Creosote contains polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbon compounds (PAH). On-site investigations from 1985 to 1993 documented creosote contamination in soil and groundwater beneath the site. Groundwater investigations also identified a multi-acre pool of liquid creosote in the surficial aquifer beneath the central portion of the site. Historical site activities also caused extensive creosote contamination in an on-site drainage ditch, which leads south to lower Greenfield Creek. Historical use of PCP at the site had resulted in soil and sediment contamination by dioxins and furans. More details on this site and other nearby sites are included in the Geotechnical Appendix (C).

3.0 PROBLEMS, NEEDS, AND OPPORTUNITIES

Problems associated with current channel alignments and width affecting navigation efficiency and ship safety have been identified by the Port of Wilmington and users of the channel in three areas of Wilmington Harbor (Figure 3.1); 1) the Entrance Channel, Reach 1; 2) the Battery Island Turn (channel), and 3) the Anchorage Basin, which is used as a turning basin. These inefficiencies can result in vessel delays and associated economic losses. The problems in these areas and opportunities to address them are discussed in more detail in the sections below.

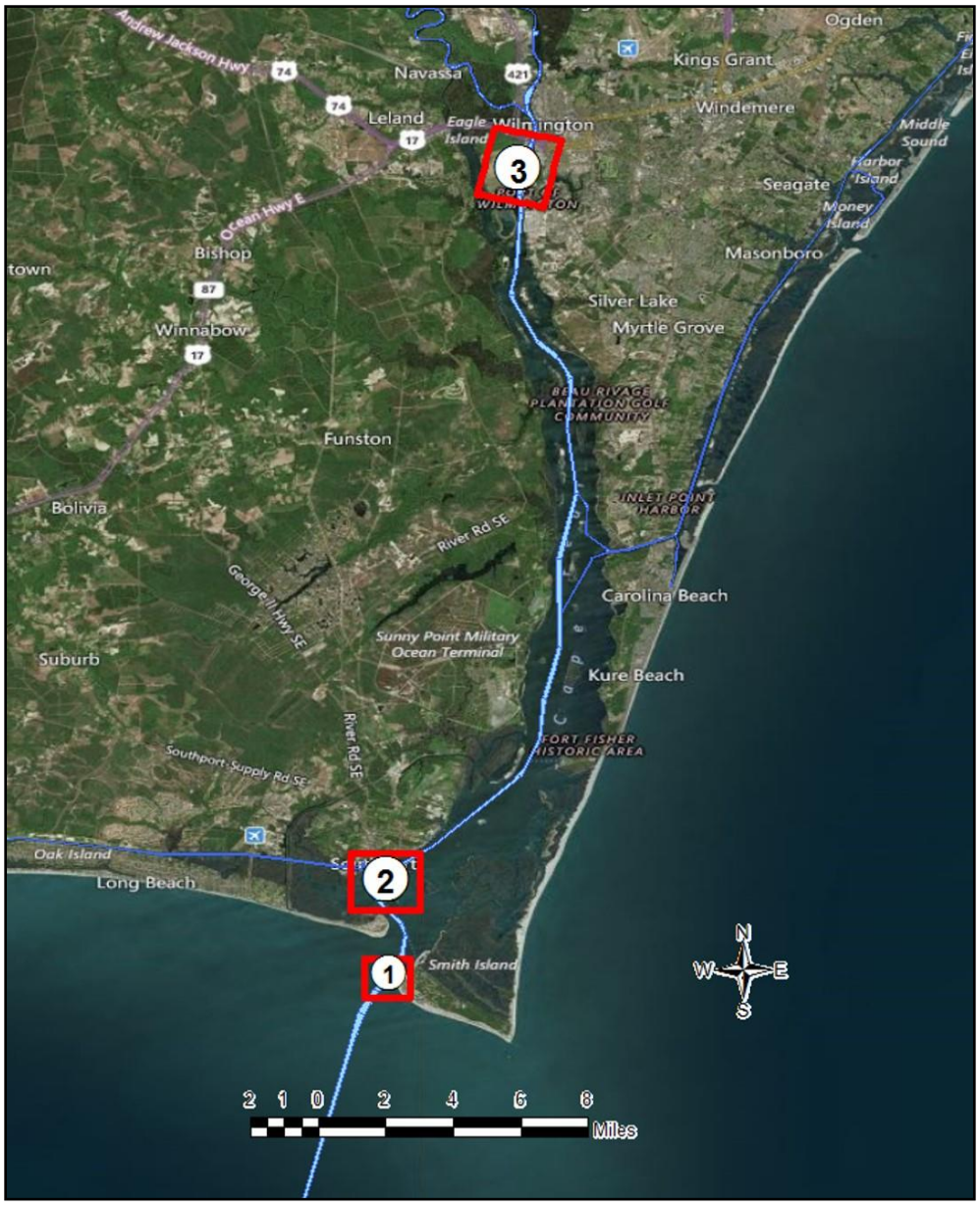


Figure 3.1. Location of problem areas in Wilmington Harbor – (1) Entrance Channel near Bald Head Island, (2) Battery Island Turn, and (3) Anchorage Basin.

3.1 Entrance Channel, Reach 1

In this report, the Entrance Channel includes the Baldhead Shoal Channel Reach 1. The current channel alignment in this area (Figure 3.2) has proven susceptible to rapid and persistent shoaling. The Sand Management Plan (SMP), presented in Appendix H, *Environmental Assessment Preconstruction Modifications of Authorized Improvements, Wilmington Harbor, NC, Appendix A (2000),* proposed dredging of the reach every other year for this area; however, the actual dredging schedule has been more intermittent due to funding limitations. Figure 3.2 depicts the shoaling that occurred prior to dredging in 2013, after a four year maintenance dredging lapse. As seen in that figure, the navigable width of part of the reach has been reduced by about half.

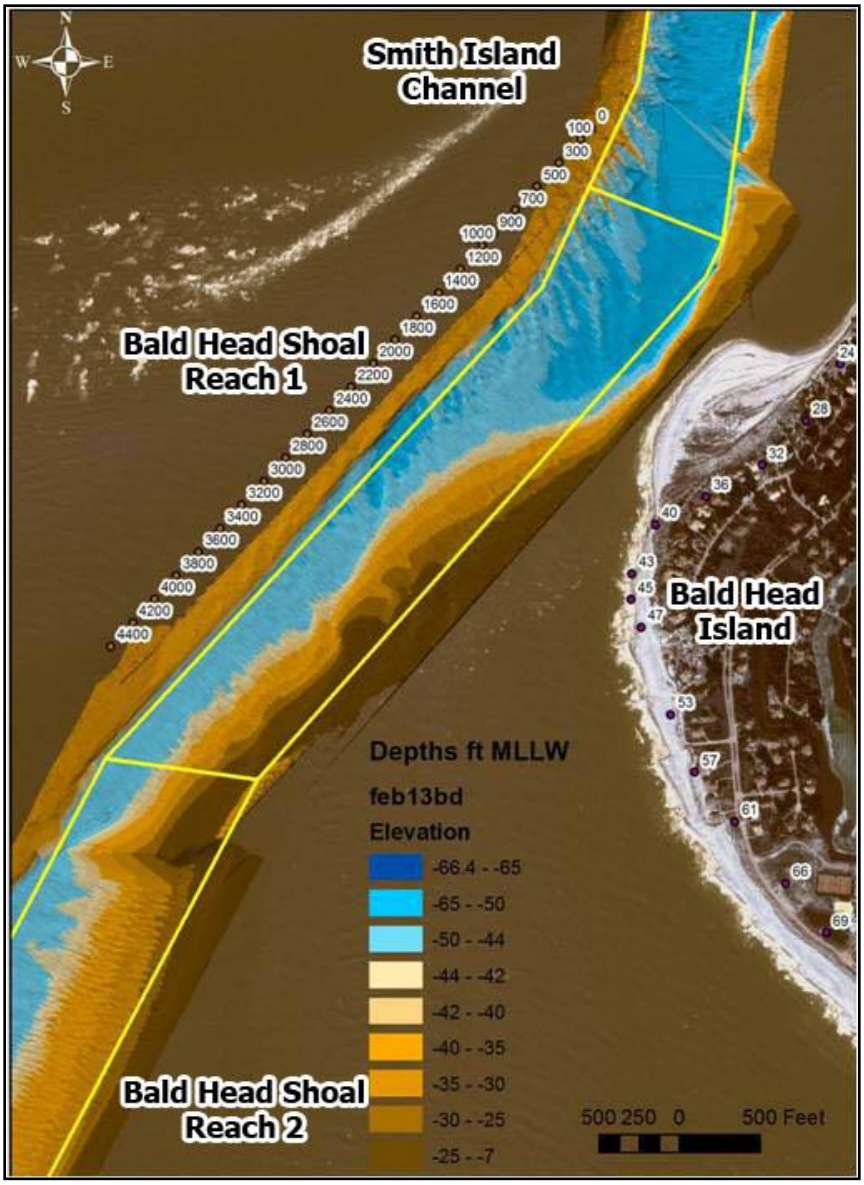


Figure 3.2. Entrance channel alignment near Bald Head Island, showing 3 years of shoaling that occurred prior to it being dredged in 2013.

Because of the shoaling and reduced channel width in Baldhead Shoal Channel Reach 1, vessels that normally could pass each other will not do so in this area, leading to transit delays. Additionally, the reduced channel width resulting from shoaling on the eastern side of the channel places vessels on the less advantageous western side of the channel for safely navigating the bend between the Baldhead Shoal Channel-Reach 1 and Smith Island Channel reaches. This problem could be addressed by either increasing the distance from the channel edge of the Baldhead Shoal portion of the study area to Bald Head Island or increasing the frequency of dredging in the area. Both could potentially improve overall channel reliability and availability. The prior could be accomplished by using a hardened shoreline structure to reduce sand loss from Bald Head Island. The Village of Bald Head Island constructed an approximately 1,900 foot terminal groin at the western end of South Beach. The long-term effects of this groin to shoaling are unknown.

3.2 Battery Island Turn

The Battery Island Turn (Figure 3.3) is problematic for some of the larger container vessels currently calling on the Port of Wilmington. Vessels are at times being forced to delay their transit and wait for favorable tides. Specifically, the 965-foot Yang Ming New Jersey and Los Angeles class and 905-foot Yang Ming East/North/South/West ships have to wait for favorable tide before making the turn if they are drafting deeper than 36 feet. There are opportunities for realigning or widening the Battery Island Turn, which would potentially improve navigation safety and efficiency and reduce delays for the impacted vessels.

Figure 3.3. Channel alignment at Battery Island.

In this report, the Battery Island Turn includes the Battery Island Channel and the adjacent channels, Lower Swash Channel to the north and Southport Channel to the south. The potential improvement for the Battery Island Turn includes widening of the Battery Island Channel, a longer cutoff between Battery Island Channel and Lower Swash Channel, and tapers between the widened Battery Island Channel and the adjacent channels (Figure 3.3)

3.3 Anchorage Basin

The existing maximum width (1,200 feet) of the Anchorage Basin (Figure 3.4) is not adequate for the larger container vessels calling on the Port of Wilmington to easily turn, and is not wide enough to allow any post-Panamax vessels to call in the future. Vessels longer than 900 feet are being slowed by several minutes and require the assistance of two tugs during the turn. There are potential opportunities to either increase the dimensions of the existing Anchorage Basin or to create a new Anchorage Basin elsewhere in the Harbor. Widening of the Basin to better accommodate the existing fleet calling on the Port could also allow some of the smaller post-Panamax ships (although larger than the design vessel) to call on the Port in the future, whereas they could not call if the basin was kept at its current width.

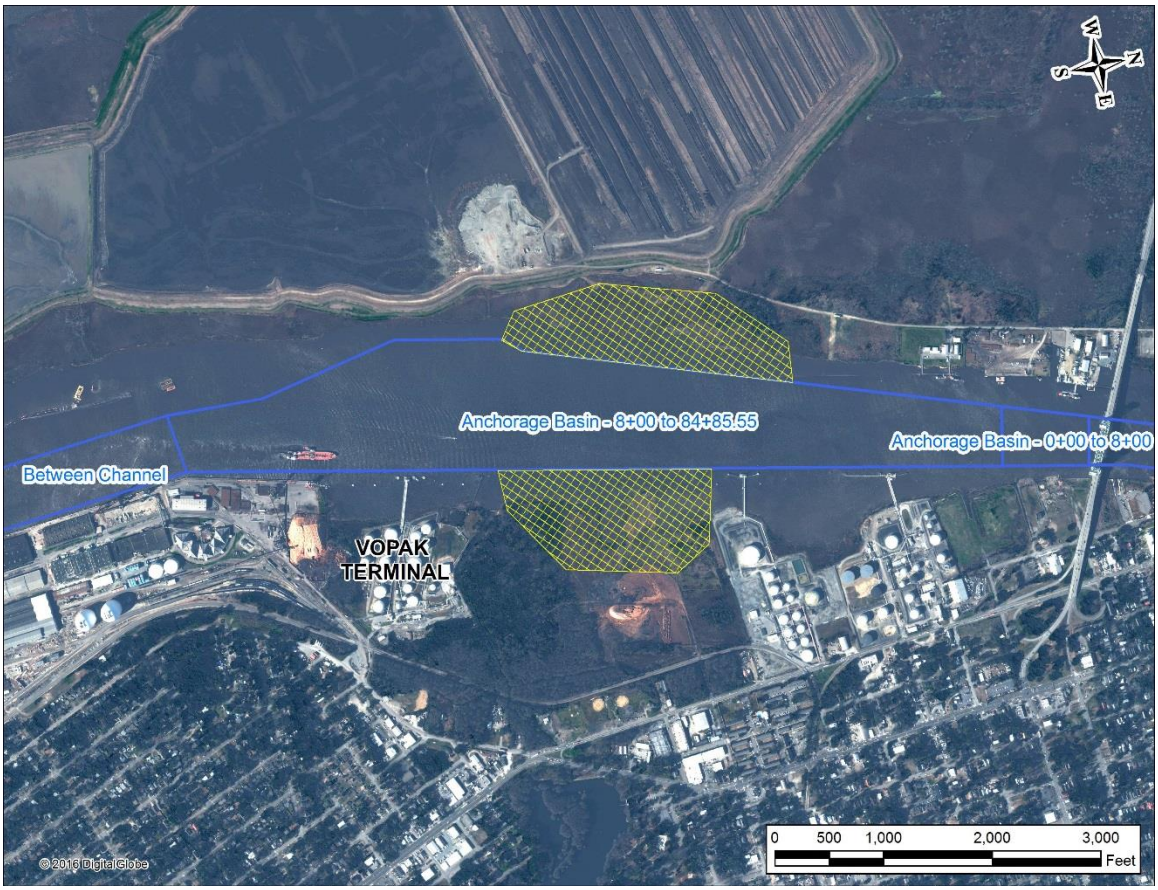


Figure 3.4. Navigation channel at the Anchorage Basin.

4.0 EXISTING CONDITIONS AND FUTURE WITHOUT-PROJECT

The existing condition of significant resources in the area was described in Chapter 2 of this report. This chapter focuses on further quantifying the existing and future without-project conditions, which form the primary basis for the comparison of benefits of project alternatives. The future without-project condition refers to a most likely future that would occur without additional changes being made by the USACE to the currently authorized channel, but would incorporate any actions planned to be undertaken by other entities in the future.

4.1 Navigation

4.1.1 Current Fleet

A thorough analysis of the existing fleet data for vessels calling at Wilmington Harbor in 2009 revealed six typical vessel types: (1) Containerships, (2) Bulk Carriers, (3) General Cargo Vessels, (4) Petroleum Tankers, (5) Chemical Tankers, and (6) Ro-Ro (Roll-on – Roll-Off) Vessels (includes Vehicle Carriers).

Containerships made up nearly 35% of the deep-draft vessel calls at Wilmington Harbor in 2009. The largest vessels that call at Wilmington Harbor at the present time are containerships of 62,000 to 65,000 deadweight tons (DWT). They are between 950 and 965-feet long, 106 feet in beam and have design drafts of between 42 and 44 feet. Their actual sailing drafts were 38 feet or less when calling at Wilmington Harbor in 2009. Containerships maintain an underkeel clearance of at least 10% of sailing draft in the channel at all times. They can carry up 4,400 to 4,800 Twenty Foot Equivalent Units (TEUs); however they generally transfer less than 1,500 TEUs at the port, which are split between imports and exports. These larger ships typically travel between the Far East and East Coast of the U.S.

Additional Container subclasses that call in Wilmington include smaller vessels in the 50,000 DWT class. These are generally about 850-feet long, have design drafts of about 41-42 feet, and can carry up to about 4,000 TEU's. An even smaller sub-class of container vessel typically service Europe and Central/South America. These vessels are generally between 20,000 DWT and 22,000 DWT. They are typically 525 to 550 feet in length, with beams ranging from 82 to 93 feet and design drafts between 32 and 35 feet. They can carry up to approximately 1,300 TEUs.

The largest Bulk Carriers were rated at about 55,000 DWT with a length of 656 feet, a beam of 106 feet and a design draft of 38 feet. The largest General Cargo vessels were rated at about 47,000 DWT with a length of 656, a beam of 102 feet and a design draft of 40.4 feet.

The largest non-container vessels that call at the Port are Oil Tankers. These vessels range in size from 70,000 DWT to 76,000 DWT with a length of 700 to 750 feet, with beams of 106 to 131 feet and design drafts ranging from 40 to 46 feet. The actual sailing drafts of these vessels in Wilmington Harbor were 38 feet or less in 2009.

4.1.2 Current Port Practices

Nearly 200,000 loaded TEU's were handled at Wilmington Harbor in 2010, making it the 17th largest container Port in the United States and the 8th largest container port on the U.S. Atlantic coast. Imports at Wilmington accounted for almost 114,000 loaded TEU's (57%) and exports accounted for about 86,000 loaded TEU's (43%). Empty containers account for an additional 13% of import containers and 25% of export containers at Wilmington. Historically, exports have increased at a faster pace than imports. In 2005 exports made up only about 33% of total shipments.

4.1.3. Potential Limits to Navigation

Turns and bends within the navigation channel have been an area of concern to pilots in the Wilmington Harbor since the 38-ft project was completed. The Wilmington Harbor '96 Act Project addressed some of these concerns, but the increase in the average containers size has led to the introduction of longer and wider vessels. Identified issues include:

- Shoaling on the east side of the navigation channel at Bald Head Island and the resultant reduced width is problematic to navigation under typical wind and tide conditions. This shoaling places vessels on the less advantageous side of the channel to navigate the bend within the Smith Island Channel reach. In order to avoid the shoaling in Baldhead Shoal Channel Reach 1, vessels are required to decrease speeds to navigate the S-shaped useable channel. Current vessel restrictions are for a 38 foot "anytime" draft (State Port Pilots; USACE communication, Feb 2011).
- The turn at Battery Island is problematic for certain (950 feet by 106 feet, and 965 feet by 106 feet) container vessels under specific wind and tide conditions.
- Vessels are being forced to delay their transit and await favorable tide conditions in order to serve the harbor. These delays are expensive and result in increased transportation costs. Certain vessels are also subject to draft restrictions as a result of this turn. Contributing factors, including ship handling characteristics and size, channel configuration, tide conditions, and inbound or outbound transit operation could influence safe maneuvering of these ships through the channel.
- Current Anchorage Basin dimensions may be adequate to properly accommodate turning of some of the larger container vessels currently calling at the North Carolina State Ports Authority. Concerns regarding current Anchorage Basin dimensions have been expressed by the North Carolina States Ports Authority and the shipping industry. Currently vessels are being turned on high tides, executing turning more slowly than normal, and requiring extra tug assistance to perform turning maneuvers.

4.2 Environmental Resources

The Future Without-project Condition of Environmental Resources is expected to be similar to the existing condition described in Section 2.

5.0 PLAN FORMULATION AND EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVES

The planning process used for this study and detailed in this section followed the six steps indicated earlier in Section 1.6. Alternatives were formulated and then screened, evaluated, and compared in an iterative process with increasing levels of detail at each sequence to finally identify the Recommended Plan. Although various analysis parameters may change at each sequence, within each sequence the parameters used to compare alternatives are kept identical.

5.1 Goals and Objectives

As outlined in the 1983 *Economic and Environmental Principles and Guidelines for Water and Related Land Resources Implementation Studies*, the Federal objective in water resources planning is to contribute to national economic development (NED) consistent with protecting the Nation's environment. The Federal objective leads to the general overall goal of this study:

Goal

Increase NED benefits at Wilmington Harbor by reducing navigation inefficiencies that are causing delays to vessels currently using the harbor.

Identifying and considering the problems, needs, and opportunities of the study area in the context of federal authorities, policies, and guidelines resulted in the establishment of the following specific objectives, which are all to be considered over a 50 year period of analysis:

Objectives

1. Reduce vessel transit times and potentially future dredging costs through the Entrance Channel, Reach 1.

2. Reduce the transit times needed for larger vessels to negotiate the Battery Island Turn portion of the navigation channel.

3. Reduce the time it takes for larger vessels currently calling on the Port to turn in the Anchorage Basin.

5.2 Constraints

The planning process is subject to the limitations imposed by the following general constraints:

a. Conformance to USACE policies for the project purpose.

b. All applicable Federal laws, regulations, and Executive Orders.

c. Current limits of knowledge, information, and predictive ability.

No specific planning constraints have been identified for this study that would further limit the planning process. Although there are many factors that may ultimately affect

the implementability of a particular alternative and be used throughout the screening process, these do not necessarily qualify as planning constraints.

5.3 Formulation and Evaluation Criteria

Alternative plans are evaluated by applying numerous, rigorous criteria. Four general criteria are considered during alternative plan screening: completeness, effectiveness, efficiency, and acceptability.

- *Completeness*: Completeness is the extent that an alternative provides and accounts for all investments and actions required to ensure the planned output is achieved. These criteria may require that an alternative consider the relationship of the plan to other public and private plans if those plans affect the outcome of the project. Completeness also includes consideration of real estate issues, O&M, monitoring, and sponsorship factors. Adaptive management plans formulated to address project uncertainties also have to be considered.
- *Effectiveness:* Effectiveness is defined as the degree to which the plan will achieve the planning objective. The plan must make a significant contribution to the problem or opportunity being addressed.
- *Efficiency*: The project must be a cost-effective means of addressing the problem or opportunity. The plan outputs cannot be produced more cost-effectively by another institution or agency.
- *Acceptability*: A plan must be acceptable to Federal, state, and local government in terms of applicable laws, regulation, and public policy. The project should have evidence of broad-based public support and be acceptable to the non-Federal cost sharing partner.

There are also specific technical criteria related to engineering, economics, and the environment, which also will be considered in evaluating alternatives. These are:

Engineering Criteria:

- The design of a safe, efficient, and reliable project which incorporates best engineering principles/practices in support of an NED plan.

Economic Criteria:

- The plan must contribute benefits to National Economic Development.
- Tangible benefits of a plan must exceed economic costs.
- Each separable unit of improvement must provide benefits at least equal to costs.

Environmental Criteria:

- The plan should fully comply with all relevant environmental laws, regulations, policies, and Executive Orders.
- The plan should represent an appropriate balance between economic benefits and environmental sustainability.

- The plan should be developed in a manner that is consistent with the USACE's Environmental Operating Principles (EOPs). (see- http://www.usace.army.mil/Missions/Environmental/EnvironmentalOperating Principles.aspx)
- Adverse impacts to the environment should be avoided. In cases where adverse effects cannot be avoided, then mitigation must be provided to minimize impacts to at least a level of insignificance.

5.4 Design Vessel

The design vessel for this study is 965 feet in length, with a beam of 106 feet, and a draft of 38-40 feet. This is the same design vessel used in the Wilmington Harbor '96 Act Project.

5.5 Identification, Examination, and Screening of Measures

Several different potential measures were initially considered for addressing the stated problems in each of the three areas of Wilmington Harbor being studied. These measures underwent an initial screening process based on their viability and practicality, potential environmental impacts, and a rough order of magnitude (ROM) cost and benefit evaluation. Generally, measures were screened out at this stage if they either would not be effective in adequately addressing the problem from a technical or implementability standpoint, if another measure could provide equivalent benefits at a lower cost, or if the measure was better pursued outside of the scope of this feasibility study. These initial measures are discussed in more detail in the following subsections. Note that the discussions below are preliminary and appropriate only for this stage of the planning process. Measures that are forwarded on for further consideration would undergo additional analysis as it relates to technical viability, environmental impacts, costs, and benefits as part of this study. In addition, a "No Action" measure at each location is always carried forward. "No Action" consists of continuance at status-quo and no additional or new measures being implemented to solve the problem in these areas.

5.5.1 Initial Measures – Entrance Channel, Reach 1

<u>Measure EC1 - Channel Realignment</u>

One potential measure for reducing the shoaling rates within the channel is to shift Baldhead Shoal Channel – Reach 1 westward approximately 150 feet to follow natural deep water (Appendix B). Channel dimensions (width and depth) would remain the same, as no widening or deepening was deemed necessary.

a) *Technical and implementability considerations*: The optimal location and effectiveness of the realignment would need to be determined, and would largely be based on an analysis of the historical movement of sand in the area and the most-likely location of deep water. Any impacts to areas on the western side of the channel resulting from the realignment would also need to be considered. However, there are no obvious technical or implementability issues with this measure.

b) *Environmental considerations*: A new area of the Cape Fear River would be dredged, although it would be adjacent to the area currently being dredged. There are historic shipwrecks in the area that may require mitigation depending on final location of the realignment, but there are no other major expected environmental impacts from this measure that would require mitigation.

c) *Preliminary costs and benefits:* There would be an initial construction cost related to dredging the new channel alignment. Analysis done during the reconnaissance phase of this study estimated the cost of this dredging to be around $2.2 million, based on dredging 200,000 cubic yards of sand and a 20% contingency (based on historic bid information). It was assumed that the dredging would occur during the normal maintenance cycle of the reach, thereby not incurring an additional mobilization cost. Preliminary benefits were not calculated but would be based on reduced future O&M costs for dredging the channel. Although vessel transit times could also be reduced with full availability of the channel, this is not a claimable economic benefit since the economic baseline presumes full channel capacity.

d) Conclusion: Because the measure appears technically viable and implementable, and there are no obvious environmental or economic issues, the measure was forwarded on for further analysis.

Measure EC2 – Hardened Structure

A hardened structure on the Bald Head Island side of the channel could reduce shoaling into the navigation channel, and consequently, reduce vessel impacts attributable to shoaling. A hardened structure could take the form of a feature perpendicular to the shoreline (i.e., a groin or jetty) or parallel to the shoreline (i.e. a breakwater feature). Groins are generally only a few hundred feet long. A jetty for the Wilmington Harbor Improvements Project that would significantly reduce shoaling would need to be several thousand feet long. A preliminary jetty alignment for the project is shown in Figure 5.1. The alignment shown in Figure 5.1 is only meant to be illustrative of the potential size and location of the structure that might be needed in order to have a substantial effect on the movement of sand into the channel.

In 2015, the Village of Bald Head Island completed a terminal groin much shorter than a jetty structure, to potentially reduce erosion on the portion of the island adjacent to the mouth of the river. This structure serves a far different purpose than the potential jetty discussed above, and would not serve to significantly reduce shoaling into the navigation channel after the fillet reaches equilibrium. Therefore, a terminal groin would not serve as a replacement in function for a jetty structure.

A jetty alignment would be offset from the eastern edge of the Reach 2 channel by approximately 1,000 feet to allow for a safety margin for vessels navigating past the structure. This margin is reduced to 800 feet along Reach 1, where the jetty is anchored within the sand spit along the southwestern corner of Bald Head Island. This alignment results in an overall jetty length of approximately 8,200 feet.

a) *Technical and implementability considerations*: With the construction of a single jetty along the eastern margin of the channel, there will be a strong tendency for the channel to migrate towards the structure over time. This, in fact occurred at Masonboro Inlet when

the north jetty was constructed in advance of the south jetty and has likewise been observed at other project locations with single structures (as documented by Kieslich 1981).With this channel shift there will also be the likely change in shoaling patterns along the entrance channel. As noted above, the present shoaling patterns along Baldhead Shoals Channel (Reach 1 & 2) is from the Bald Head side of the channel. Very little shoaling has been observed along the western side coming from Jay Bird Shoals, except in the Smith Island Channel reach. With the migratory response to the eastern single jetty, a likely scenario will be the encroachment of Jay Bird Shoals along the western margin of the Bald Head Shoal channel. Such a reversal in shoaling patterns could render an eastern jetty less effective and could result in a need for maintenance dredging along the opposite side of the channel. As with Masonboro Inlet (and most stabilized inlets), a second jetty was necessary to properly exclude sediment from entering the channel from each side. Adding a second structure along the Oak Island/Caswell Beach side would be costly. A final consideration is the impact of a jetty (or jetties) to the overall sediment management plan of the project. Additional detailed analysis would be necessary to determine what impact such a feature would have on the adjacent beaches. For example would sand bypassing be needed for operation of such a plan to mitigate for any project induced erosion? If necessary, the inclusion of a sand bypassing plan would be an additional cost of the jetty plan.

Figure 5.1. Conceptual alignment for a Bald Head Island jetty feature.

b) *Environmental considerations*: The two major concerns with a jetty are the potential to reduce larval transport from the ocean to the Cape Fear River estuary, and alteration of beach habitat. Modeling would be required to determine the impact on larval transport.

Beach habitat would not only be altered by sand accumulating behind the jetty, but the jetty would be anchored by a revetment extending 2,600 feet into the island (per the conceptual plan). Depending on the final revetment alignment and length, several acres of terrestrial habitat would be altered. These environmental impacts of the jetty would likely be higher than that of realigning the channel, and could potentially require substantial mitigation.

c) Preliminary costs and benefits: In the absence of a detailed design for this measure, a rough cost estimate was prepared by comparing the cost of a jetty at nearby Masonboro Inlet. The south jetty at Masonboro Inlet was constructed over the period of 1978-80 at a cost of $5,614,000. Given the overall south jetty length of 3,500 feet the resulting cost-per-foot is $1,604 at 1978 price levels. This unit cost escalated to 2012 price level amounts to $5,418/foot, based on ENR Construction Cost Indexing. This per foot cost is applied directly to the 8,200 foot conceptual length of the Wilmington Harbor Jetty and is taken as one-half of this value (i.e. $2,709/foot) for the 2,600 foot-long revetment. The cost of both structures, after applying a contingency factor of 25% to account for the uncertainties of this conceptual level plan, results in a total estimated cost of $64,000,000. A summary of the cost calculation is contained in Table 5.1.

The projected $64 million dollar cost is likely an underestimate, for a few reasons. First, given the relatively greater channel depths at Cape Fear (40-60 feet) versus those of Masonboro Inlet (20-30 feet), additional costs that are not accounted for would likely be incurred to prevent undermining of the jetty from channel migration. Also, based on recent (2012) bids received for repairs of the Masonboro South Jetty, actual unit prices for armor stone are substantially higher than the escalated cost based on the ENRConst Cost Index. Finally, the cost does not include any environmental mitigation which might be required.

Preliminary benefits were not calculated but would be based on reduced future O&M costs for dredging the channel. Although vessel transit times could also be reduced with full availability of the channel, this is not a claimable economic benefit since the economic baseline presumes full channel capacity. Benefits with regards to reduced O&M would likely be higher than that of measure EC1, but not by the orders of magnitude needed to justify the substantially higher cost.

d) Conclusion: The purpose of a jetty is to stabilize an inlet. While one of the means to achieve inlet stabilization is controlling the littoral transport into the inlet, in this case, the inlet is stable Therefore, due to the relatively high costs and the relative stability of the inlet, and failure to provide a solution to the identified problem without negative impacts to other features of the system, a hardened structure was screened from further consideration.

Example jetties which were constructed by the USACE Wilmington District are located at Masonboro Inlet, NC.

Table 5.1. Cost estimate calculation for conceptual jetty feature for Bald Head Island.

	Length	**Year Built**	**Cost**	**Cost per Foot**
Masonboro Inlet South Jetty	3500	1978-80	$5,614,000	$1,604
Price Level	1978	2012	Price Level	2012 Cost per ft
ENRConst Cost Index	2776	9376	3.378	$5,418

Structure	**Length**	**Cost**	**Cost per Foot**	
Wilmington Harbor Jetty	8200	$44,423,866	$5,418	
Revetment	2600	$7,042,808	$2,709	
Subtotal	10800	$51,466,674		
Contingency	25%	$12,533,669		
Total		**$64,000,000**		

Measure EC3 – Increase Dredging Frequency

a) *Technical and implementability considerations*: This measure would involve dredging the current channel alignment every year, instead of every two years as is currently authorized, thus increasing full channel availability. Maintenance dredging as part of the current authorization occurred in 2005, 2007, 2009, and 2013 but did not occur in 2011 due to lack of funding. Since consistent funding is not available to dredge on the current two year cycle, it is unlikely that funding for an even higher dredging frequency would be realistic.

b) *Environmental considerations*: This measure would not impact any new areas within the Cape Fear River; however, the existing channel would be impacted more frequently and the associated placement of sand on the beach would occur more often. If this dredging and placement activity was performed during the colder months, the extent of environmental impact would probably be minimal, and would not likely require any mitigation.

c) *Preliminary costs and benefits*: This measure would involve an increase in O&M costs. Although the total volumes to be dredged and disposed over a given period of time would remain roughly similar as compared to current conditions, dredge mobilizations/demobilizations would occur every year instead of every two years. This is opposed to measures EC1 and EC2, which might be expected to reduce O&M costs. Although vessel transit times could also be reduced with full availability of the channel, this is not a claimable economic benefit since the economic baseline presumes full channel capacity.

d) *Conclusion*: Considering current and anticipated future funding constraints, it is unlikely that this measure could ever be fully implemented. In addition, it does nothing to address the objective of reducing future O&M costs, and would in fact increase those costs. For these reasons, this measure was screened from further consideration.

Measure EC4 – Advanced Maintenance Dredging of Channel Width

This measure would involve, during the normal maintenance cycle, dredging additional channel width, thus potentially increasing channel availability prior to the next dredging. Advanced maintenance could occur on the existing channel alignment, or on a new alignment.

a) *Technical and implementability considerations:* Under certain circumstances, implementation of advanced maintenance for the currently authorized channel width could

be approved at the USACE South Atlantic Division and would not require further congressional authorization. Hence, this measure could potentially be analyzed and implemented outside the purview of this current feasibility study. However, limited advanced maintenance of the channel width is not likely to be very effective, due to the rapid shoaling that occurs in the channel, and the limited area in which the advanced maintenance could occur. Further, dredging to the east of the channel towards Bald Head Island could possibly lead to shoreline impacts. Substantial dredging to the west (which would be necessary to effectively keep up with the shoaling) could cause impacts to Oak Island and would also cause problems with tying the reach back into the rest of the channel.

b) *Environmental considerations:* Because of the technical and implementability issues discussed above, environmental considerations were not assessed in detail. A new area of the Cape Fear River would be dredged, although the dredging area would be adjacent to the channel currently being dredged. There are historic shipwrecks in the vicinity that may require mitigation depending on final location of an advanced maintenance area, but there are no other major expected environmental impacts from this measure that would require mitigation.

c) *Preliminary costs and benefits:* Preliminary costs and benefits have not been determined for this measure.

d) *Conclusion:* Because of the technical and implementability issues discussed above, it was screened from further consideration.

Measure EC5 – Alteration of Sand Placement Location

Some of the shoaling in the channel may be attributable to where the dredged material is currently being placed on Bald Head Island. This measure would involve altering where the sand is being placed on the island.

a) *Technical and implementability considerations:* This measure could be implemented without additional Congressional authorization but would require a new Sand Management Plan (SMP). A SMP is an advisory document, not a decision document, authorization, or appropriation document, although it may advise future decisions on dredged material placement. An updated SMP may require a cost-sharing agreement with both communities to receive funds due to the potential that it may be more costly than the federal standard and/or the current plan, which places material on only one or the other beach with each dredging cycle.

b) *Environmental considerations*: An Environmental Assessment would be required for the new Sand Management Plan.

c) *Preliminary costs and benefits:* TBD.

d) Conclusion: Placement of suitable material on Bald Head Island would follow recommendations contained in the SMP.

5.5.2 Initial Measures – Battery Island Turn

Ship simulations, done in the 1990's, indicate that the passage around Battery Island (Lower Swash thru Southport channels) required an average channel width of about 750 feet along 8,000 feet of channel. Currently, Lower Swash channel is 400-feet wide, Battery Island Channel is 500 feet wide and Southport channel is 500-feet wide. An existing cutoff

at Lower Swash/Battery Island widens the channel to about 700-feet wide along the apex of the turn.

Measure BI1 – Widen the Existing Turn

This measure would reduce the existing sharp turn angle at Battery Island by widening the channel in that area. The channel could potentially be widened to the east, west, or a combination of both.

a) *Technical and implementability considerations*: The optimal area to locate the channel widener would still need to be determined, and would be based on cost and environmental considerations, as well as the current path of vessels through the turn (some vessels currently utilize natural deep water outside of the existing channel when making the turn). There are a number of underwater cultural resource targets in the area immediately to the east of the current turn, and impacts to the Battery Island shoreline from locating the channel closer to it would need to be considered. The area to the west of the turn is shallower water as compared to the east, and thus would require additional dredging volumes.

b) *Environmental considerations*: There are number of underwater cultural resource targets in the area immediately to the east of the current turn, and erosion to the Battery Island shoreline from locating the channel closer to it would also need to be considered. The area to the west of the turn is shallower water as compared to the east, and thus would require additional dredging volumes. Widening on the west side does not involve any Primary Nursery Areas, areas less than 10 feet deep, or known cultural resources. Thus, mitigation would probably not be required for dredging there. However if the channel was widened on the east side, the Battery Island shoreline may need to be stabilized to preclude erosion and mitigation would be required for cultural resource concerns. Measures would also be required to preclude blasting impacts on fisheries, marine mammals, and sea turtles.

c) *Preliminary costs and benefits:* Benefits have not been quantified at this stage, but would be gained from the 965 foot and 905 foot vessels currently calling on the Port not having to be delayed by waiting for fair tide when they are drafting greater than 36 feet. Analysis done during the reconnaissance phase of this study estimated the cost of this dredging (with the widening occurring entirely to the east) to be around $4 million dollars, based on dredging 157,900 cubic yards of sand or silt, blasting 7,100 cubic yards of rock, plus mobilization and equipment costs and a 25% contingency. This estimate does not include the cost of any potential cultural resources mitigation.

d) Conclusion: Because the measure appears technically viable and implementable and there are no obvious economic or prohibitive environmental issues, it was forwarded on for further analysis.

Measure BI2 – Relocate Channel to the East of Battery Island

This measure would relocate and straighten the channel to the east side of Battery Island (Figure 5.2), thus eliminating any issues with the current turn. The new channel would be dug to existing authorized depth (44 feet) and width (500 feet).

a) *Technical and implementability considerations*: There is not much data regarding the new channel area (i.e., amount of rock, cultural resources, and environmental surveys), so there is uncertainty with regards to this measure. Additional hydrodynamic modeling

would also need to be conducted to ascertain whether the river would follow this new alignment.

b) *Environmental concerns:* There would be many environmental concerns and issues related to this measure, including probable impacts to cultural resources, shellfish beds, marsh, shallow water habitat, and to Battery Island and Striking Island (to the east of the new alignment). Surveys for cultural resources and shellfish beds would be required before an assessment on impact could be made, but these resources are likely to be present. Based on preliminary information gleaned during the reconnaissance phase of this study, about 13 acres of marsh would be lost from Battery and Striking Islands and about 202 acres of shallow water habitat (less than 10 feet deep) would be lost. Also, the channel would be located between Battery and Striking Islands, which are important colonial waterbird nesting areas managed by The Audubon Society. Shoreline stabilization would probably be required to protect these islands from ship wakes. If blasting within the channel is required due to the presence of rock, measures would also be required to preclude blasting impacts on fisheries, marine mammals, and sea turtles.

Figure 5.2. Potential alignment for measure BI2.

c) Preliminary costs and benefits: Analysis estimated that this measure would involve dredging approximately 13,244,000 cubic yards of material with 2 % rock at a total preliminary cost of $381,957,000. Additionally, environmental mitigation costs were

estimated at approximately $46 million, based on estimates developed during the reconnaissance phase of this study. Thus, the cost of this measure would be substantially higher than measure BI1. On the benefits side, similar to BI1, vessel delays based on waiting for fair tide would be eliminated. Additionally, vessels could likely shorten total transit times because the new alignment would require a shorter distance (approximately 1 mile) to be traveled. These benefits have not been quantified, but it is highly unlikely that, as compared to measure BI1, the additional transit time benefits gained from the new alignment would exceed the additional costs for construction and mitigation.

d) Conclusion: This measure is almost certain to be less cost effective for achieving the study objectives than BI1, while also incurring substantially more environmental impacts. Using the total number of calls estimated for 2018 and 2022 (by sub class) and the vessel operating costs used in the HarborSym model (provided by IWR) for the most likely sea voyage costs for each sub class and assuming that each transit saves just under 5 minutes per transit (11 knots/12.659 mph/1 miles reduction in distance), the average annual benefits would be approximately $800,000 using a 3.5% discount rate. Assuming a $400 million construction cost and no additional O&M during the period of analysis, the average annual costs are over $17,000,000. When increasing the barge traffic to the 2005 total around 87,000, the average annual benefits increase to $1,700,000 or about a 0.1 BC Ratio. Therefore, this measure was eliminated from further consideration.

5.5.3 Initial Measures – Anchorage Basin Widening

Measure AB1 – Widen the Existing Location to 1,450 feet

This measure would widen the existing Anchorage Basin to 1,450 feet. This is the minimum recommended Anchorage Basin design width (1.5 x ship length) for the largest ship currently calling on the port, which is the 965-foot long Panamax size vessel. The Anchorage Basin is currently being proposed by the Port to be increased by 200 feet adjacent to the Vopak terminal south of the easterly potential areas noted in Figure 5.3.

a) *Technical and implementability considerations*: Because of existing infrastructure, which includes the Eagle Island Dredged Material Disposal site to the west and Port facilities to the east, there is limited room for the existing Anchorage Basin to be widened. Figure 5.3 shows the potential locations where this widening could occur.

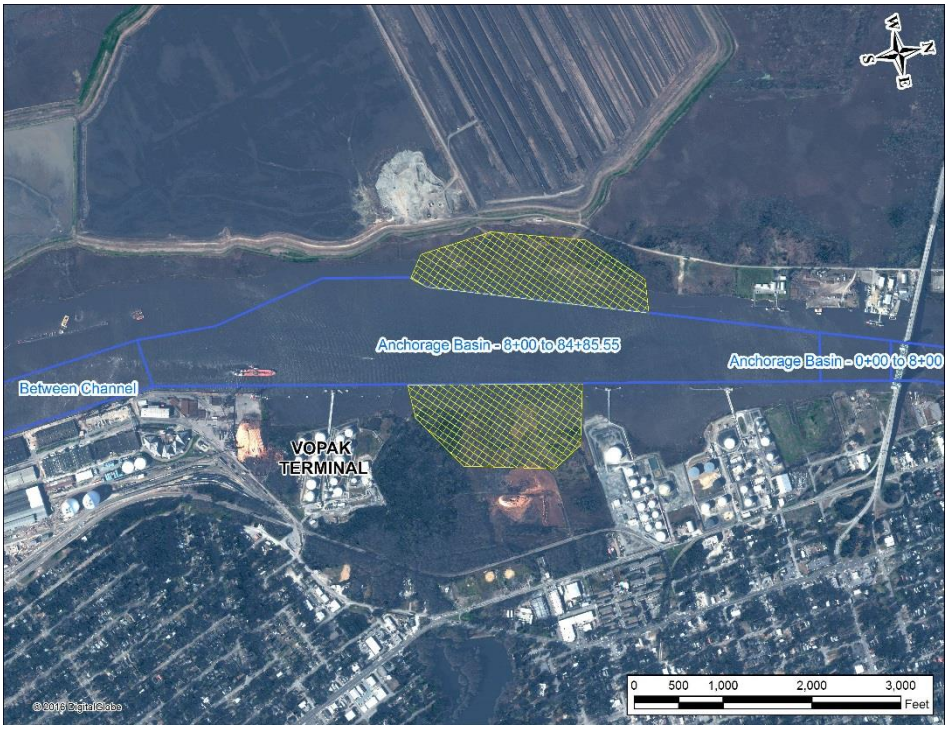


Figure 5.3. Approximate potential areas (yellow hatched) for widening the existing Anchorage Basin.

The widening could be towards the east, west, or some combination of the two. Expansion to the west (towards Eagle Island) could potentially cause stability issues with the Eagle Island dike. The land to the east has HTRW issues and any dredging past the shoreline would require HTRW cleanup. Any HTRW cleanup required would be at 100% non-Federal cost.

b) *Environmental considerations*: In addition to the HTRW issues to the east, the area to the west in front of the Eagle Island dike and the shoreline adjacent to the HTRW area are wetlands and all areas outside of the existing channel and Anchorage Basin are designated Primary Nursery Areas. Analysis during the reconnaissance phase of the study indicated that 28 acres of primary nursery would potentially be impacted including about 13 acres of marsh. The mitigation costs associated with this impact would be about $11 million. If blasting is required due to the presence of rock, measures would also be required to preclude blasting impacts on fisheries, marine mammals, and sea turtles. However, marine mammals and sea turtles are not likely present this far from the ocean.

c) *Preliminary costs and benefits:* Discussion with the pilots indicate that expansion of the Anchorage Basin to 1,450 feet would save several minutes on turning ships greater than 900 feet in length, or that the turn could be made with the use of only one tug, rather than two (although in this case the turning time would be the same as the existing condition). A preliminary benefits analysis based on savings from turning time alone indicates benefits of a few hundred thousand dollars over a 50-year period of analysis. These benefits do not include any relating to post-Panamax ships being able to call on the Port with the expanded Anchorage Basin width, as they cannot call under current conditions. Although a 1,450-

foot wide basin does not meet the minimum recommended design criteria for any vessel longer than 965 feet, longer ships would not be prohibited from calling. Based on the ratio of a 965 foot ship turning in a 1200 foot basin (0.80), a 1,160 foot ship could theoretically turn in a 1,450 foot basin.

Analysis done during the reconnaissance phase of this study estimated the cost of widening (towards Eagle Island only - similar to recent deepening of this area in 2013) to be around $25.5 million dollars, based on dredging 1,441,000 cubic yards of sand or silt, blasting 89,000 cubic yards of rock, plus mobilization and equipment costs and a 25% contingency. This cost includes about $11 million dollars in estimated environmental mitigation costs. However, the costs did not factor in any costs associated with the stabilization of the Eagle Island dike if that were to be necessary.

d) Conclusion: Because the measure appears technically viable and implementable and there are no obvious economic or prohibitive environmental issues, it was forwarded on for further analysis.

Measure AB2 – Create a new Anchorage Basin at the Mouth of the Brunswick River

This measure would involve creating a new 1,450 foot wide Anchorage Basin approximately 2 miles south of the existing one, at the mouth/confluence of the Brunswick and Cape Fear Rivers. A preliminary engineering drawing of the new Anchorage Basin is shown in Figure 5.4.

a) *Technical and implementability considerations*: Further investigations/surveys would need to be conducted to adequately characterize the sediment outside of the existing channel. There are buried utility lines that would also likely have to be relocated. Larger ships that docked north of the Anchorage Basin would have to back up for 2 miles before they could turn.

b) *Environmental considerations*: Based on the preliminary alignment, all new areas to be dredged would include 54 acres of PNA, including about 5 acres of marsh. The impact would require mitigation. If blasting is required due to the presence of rock, measures would also be required to preclude blasting impacts on fisheries, marine mammals, and sea turtles. However, marine mammals and sea turtles are not likely present this far from the ocean.

c) *Preliminary costs and benefits:* It is estimated that this alternative would require the dredging of 2,460,200 cubic yards of sand or silt and 25,400 cubic yards of rock, or about twice the dredging volume of alternative AB1. Also, if similar mitigation costs per acre are used as for Measure AB1, mitigation costs would be about $21 million for AB2. The costs of relocating buried utility lines would also need to be investigated and factored into the total cost for the alternative. Although not quantified at this stage, the benefits from this alternative would also likely be somewhat lower than that of AB1 as larger ships would have to back up 2 miles from the Port before they could turn, thus increasing transit times as compared to AB1.

d) Conclusion: Because this alternative is substantially more than alternative AB1, with fewer benefits, it was screened from further consideration.

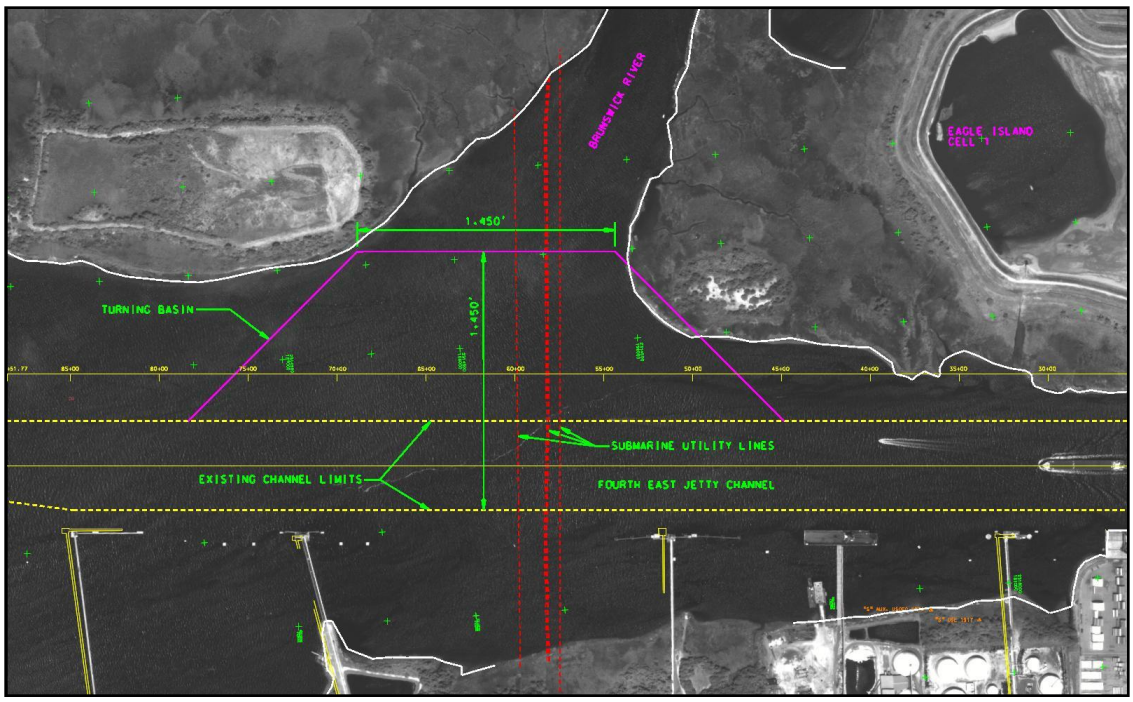


Figure 5.4. Approximate location and design (purple line) of a new Anchorage Basin.

5.5.4 Nonstructural Measures

Nonstructural measures (NS) as they relate to navigation projects can include such actions as vessel lightering, tug assistance, vessel operating practices, traffic management, under keel clearance restrictions, and utilization of the tide. Nonstructural measures are already being fully utilized for operating vessels as safely and efficiently as possible in the channel given the current conditions. Hence, additional nonstructural measures for addressing the problems outlined in this study do not need to be considered further.

5.5.5 Initial Measures – Summary

Table 5.2 contains a summary of the measures screening process and results.

In addition to No Action (NA), the measures moved forward for more detailed analysis were EC1 (realigning the Entrance Channel, Reach 1), BI1 (widening the existing Battery Island Turn), and AB1 (Widening the existing Anchorage Basin to 1450 feet).

Table 5.2. Summary of measures considered.

Measure Code	Location	Description	Preliminary Cost	Benefits	Status	Reason for Screening out
EC1	Entrance Channel, Reach 1	Realign Channel	$3 million	TBD	Forwarded for further analysis	N/A
EC2	Entrance Channel, Reach 1	Hardened Structure	$64 million	TBD, probably comparable to EC1	Screened out	Cost
EC3	Entrance Channel, Reach 1	Increase Dredging Frequency	TBD but likely higher than EC1	TBD, probably lower than EC1	Screened out	Does not meet study objectives
EC4	Entrance Channel, Reach 1	Advanced Maintenance	Unknown	Unknown	Screened out	Potential unacceptable impacts to adjacent shores
EC5	Entrance Channel, Reach 1	Alteration of Sand Placement Location	Unknown	Unknown	Screened out	To be considered under existing Wilmington Harbor 96 Act Project.
BI1	Battery Island Turn	Widen Existing Turn	$4 million	TBD	Forwarded for further analysis	N/A
BI2	Battery Island Turn	Relocate Channel	Several hundred million	TBD, probably slightly higher than BI1	Screened out	Cost, Environmental impacts
AB1	Anchorage Basin	Widen at Existing Location to 1450’	$25.5 million	TBD	Forwarded for further analysis	N/A
AB2	Anchorage Basin	Create new 1450’ Anchorage Basin two miles south	At least twice as much as AB1	TBD, but lower than AB1	Screened out	Potential costs are higher and benefits are lower than AB1
NA	No Action	None	None	None	Forwarded for further analysis	N/A
NS	Non-Structural	None	None	None	Screened out	Fully implemented in existing and future without-project condition

5.6 Detailed Development of Final Array of Alternatives

The measures that were carried forwarded after the initial screening underwent additional technical and engineering analyses. Discussions and input from the Cape Fear River pilots were also used to help inform the design of these measures. The engineering analyses are discussed in more detail in Appendix B, and are summarized below.

These measures can provide benefits alone or can be combined with one or both of the other measures. It was determined that each measure was a separable element with a separate set of benefits and costs. These stand-alone and combined measures, along with the No Action measure form the Final Array of Alternatives.

5.6.1 Alternative 1 – Re-align Entrance Channel, Reach 1

Maintenance dredging from 2007 to 2015 has produced an average of approximately 364,00 cy per dredging event. Re-aligning the channel (EC1) was analyzed as a way of obtaining a one-time reduction in the volume dredged and thus a one-time cost savings. The reduction is a one-time occurrence since moving the channel does not reduce the littoral sediment flow into the channel or the rate at which the channel will shoal. The volume contained in three new alignments for Baldhead Shoal Channel Reach 1 was compared to the volume contained in the existing alignment for the February 2013 before-dredging survey. A volume reduction can be obtained by moving the channel to the west, approximately 150 feet away from the shoal that forms on the east side of the channel until the channel starts to cut into the bank on the west side of the channel which offsets reductions obtained from the move away from the shoal on the east side of the channel. The three alignments analyzed are shown in Figure 5.5 along with a table of volume reductions. While there is very little difference amongst the volume reductions for all three alignments, alignment 2 has the greatest volume reduction.

The dredged material from the relocation of the Entrance Channel, Reach 1 will be used to return beach compatible sediment back to the adjacent beach system where compatible in accordance with the 2000 EA Sand Management Plan (Appendix H).

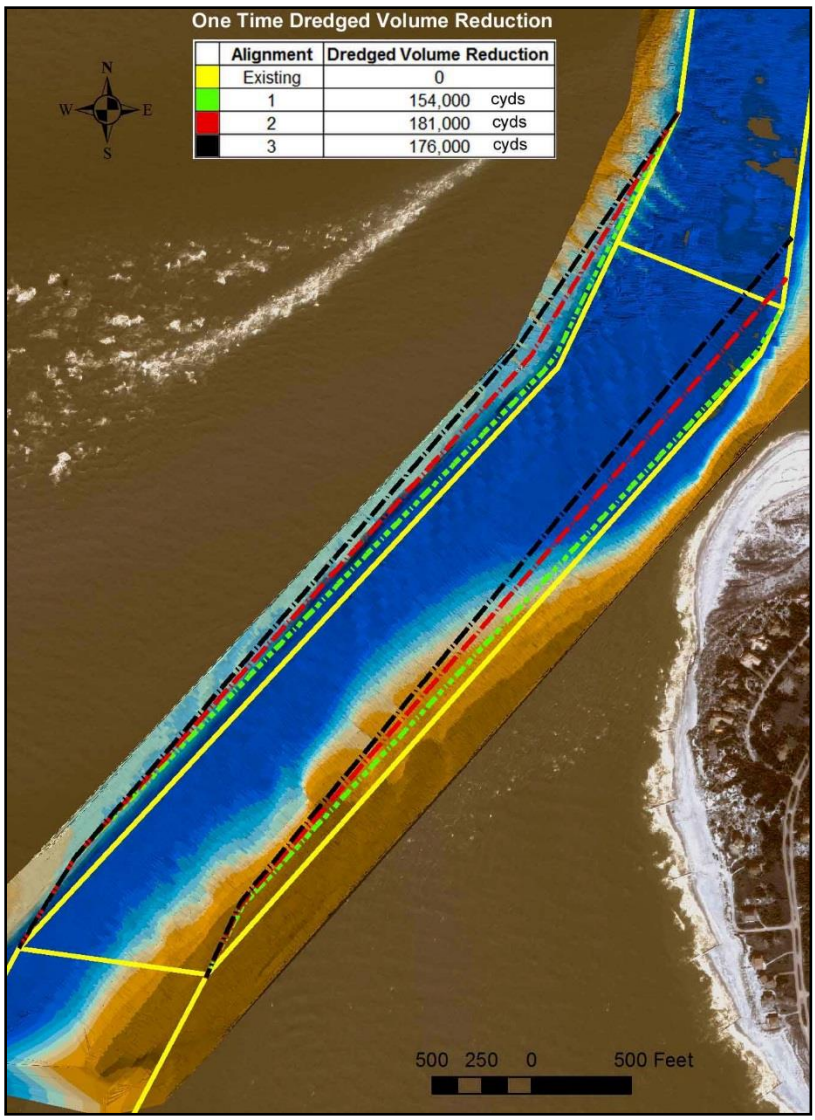


Figure 5.5. Entrance Channel, Reach 1 Realignment alternatives.

5.6.2 Alternative 2 – Widen existing Battery Island Turn (Channel)

The following improvements are proposed (BI1): (1) widen Battery Island Channel to 750 feet; (2) provide 750 feet by 1,300 feet cutoff between Battery Island and Lower Swash Channels; and (3) provide additional tapers where Southport and Lower Swash channels join the widened Battery Island Channel. These geometric changes increase the available turning radius from about 2,850 feet to about 3,900 feet; a 37% increase (Figure 5.6).

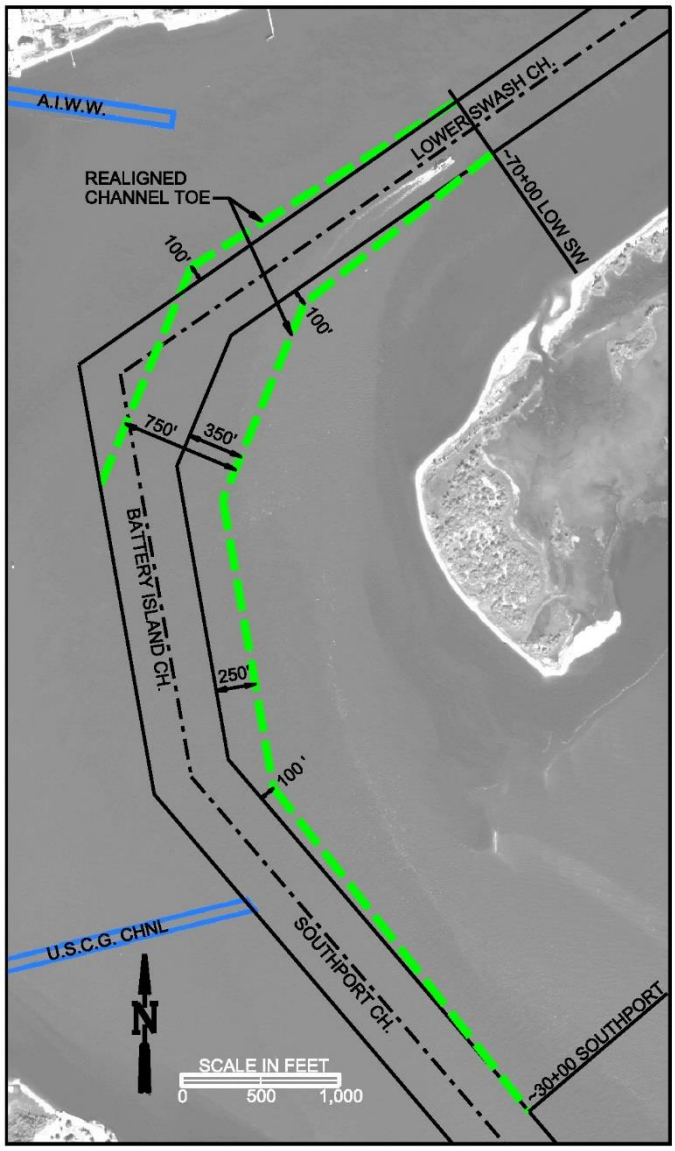


Figure 5.6. Alignment for Battery Island Turn Widening.

Existing and new washprobe data collected for this study were used to determine TOR depths in the expansion area. Construction of the widened Battery Island Turn would potentially require removal of rock, although this is highly unlikely and the quantities are minimal. Materials to be removed largely include fine sand, silty sand, sandy clay, and some gravel. Some material is potentially beach compatible; however, it is isolated in pockets, of low total volume, and would be economically infeasible to place on a beach. All material removed from Battery Island Turn will need to be disposed of in the ODMDS.

Initial construction dredging quantities are shown in Table 5.3. The authorized depth of the channel changes from 44 feet to 42 feet at the intersection of Lower Swash Channel and Battery Island Channel. Depending on the channel section, quantities were calculated to 47 feet or 45 feet, which allows for one foot of required overdepth and two feet of allowable

overdepth in addition to the authorized depth. Calculation of these quantities is detailed in the Engineering Appendix (B). Proposed channel improvements are based on a combination of engineer manual (EM) guidance, previous ship simulations and input from ship pilots.

Table 5.3. Initial construction dredging quantities for the widened Battery Island Turn.

Battery Island Dredging Quantities			
Part 1			
Station 70+00 Lower Swash Channel to Battery Island Channel Intersection			
Depth (ft)	**Sediment (cy)**	**Rock (cy)**	**Total Volume (cy)**
-42*	66,195	5	66,200
-43	82,200	200	82,400
-44	100,300	900	101,200
-45	120,000	2,400	122,400
Part 2			
Battery Island Channel Intersection to Station 30+00 Southport Channel			
Depth (ft)	**Sediment (cy)**	**Rock (cy)**	**Total Volume (cy)**
-44*	263,870	30	263,900
-45	299,100	300	299,400
-46	336,300	700	337,000
-47	374,800	1,500	376,300
* Authorized depth. Additional depths are to account for required and allowable dredging overdepth.			

5.6.3 Alternative 3 – Widen Existing Anchorage Basin to 1450 feet

Figure 5.7 shows the location of the widened Anchorage Basin (AB1). The Anchorage Basin length and side slopes would remain unchanged, but it would have a maximum width of 1450 feet, which would meet the recommended design standards outlined in EM 1110-2-1613 for a 965-ft long ship. This alternative relocates the widest portion of the Anchorage Basin approximately 700 feet north of its current location. This shift northward is necessary to allow for adequate room for the widening and to minimize impacts to the adjacent Eagle Island Disposal Area dike. The factor of safety analysis is detailed in the Geotechnical Appendix C. The results of the analysis, in summary, are that widening of the Basin would result in a factor of safety lower than that which the dike was designed for. Pursing this alternative would require a design modification to the dike such that widening of the Basin would not negatively impact the factor of safety for the dike.

Two O&M scenarios were also considered for the widened Anchorage Basin. Scenario 1 would continue to maintain a portion of the existing Anchorage Basin (the area shown in orange in Figure 5.7). This would allow smaller ships that do not need the full 1450 foot width to continue to turn in the existing location, rather than having to travel the additional distance north. The pilots indicated that maintaining this existing area would be desirable from their perspective. Scenario 2 would no longer maintain this area and thus reduce total O&M costs as compared to Scenario 1.

Existing and new washprobe data collected for this study were used to determine TOR depths in the expansion area. Construction of the widened Anchorage Basin would require removal of rock. Initial construction dredging quantities are shown in Table 5.4. The quantities are calculated to 45 feet, which allows for one foot of required overdepth and two feet of allowable overdepth on top of the 42 foot authorized depth. Calculation of these quantities is detailed in the Engineering Appendix (B). Material would be disposed of in the Eagle Island containment area.

In terms of O&M, Scenario 1 would require approximately 218,000 cy per year of additional dredging as compared to the without-project condition. Scenario 2 would require approximately 288,000 cy per year of additional dredging as compared to the without-project condition. The calculation of these shoaling rates/O&M dredging quantities is discussed in detail in the Engineering Appendix (B).

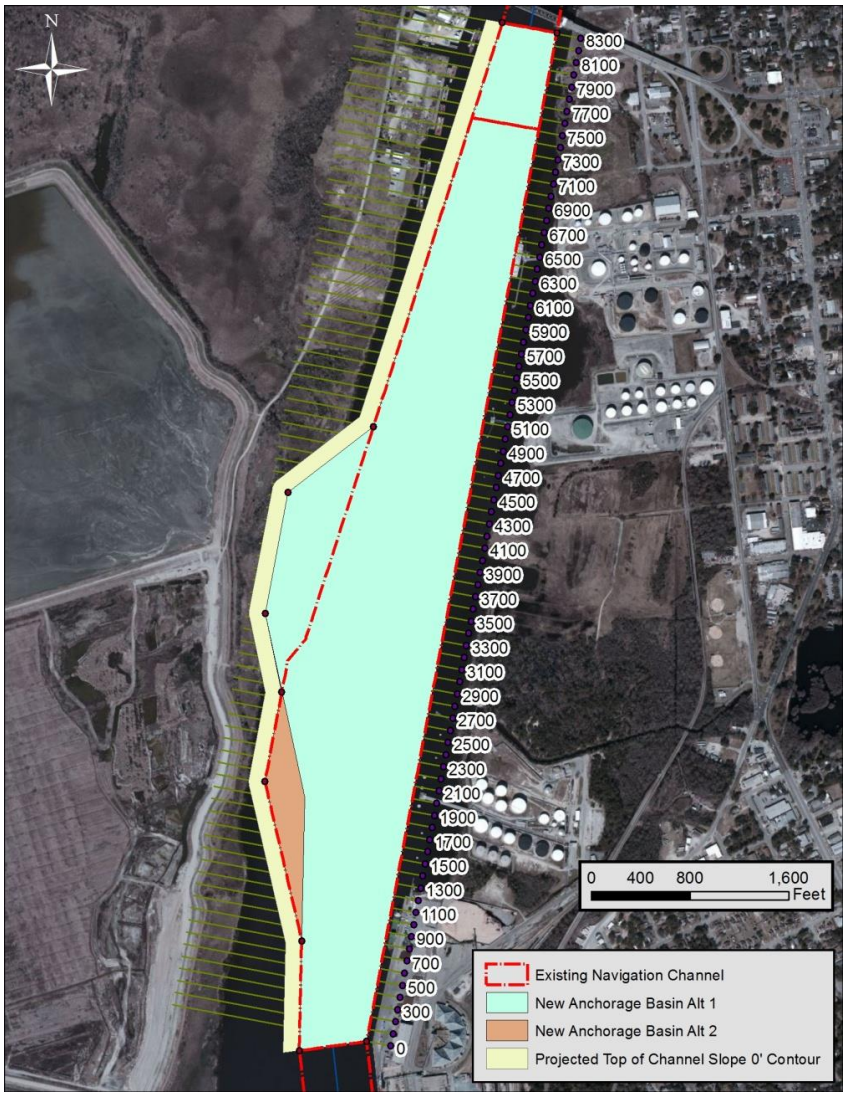


Figure 5.7. Location of widened Anchorage Basin, with different O&M scenarios.

Table 5.4. Initial construction dredging quantities for the widened Anchorage Basin to 1,450 ft at various elevation.

Elevation (ft) MLLW	Sediment (cy)	Rock (cy)	Total Volume (cy)
-42*	1,099,500	123,900	1,223,400
-43	1,118,200	145,000	1,263,200
-44	1,135,800	167,500	1,303,300
-45	1,151,200	192,500	1,343,700
* Authorized depth. Additional depths are to account for required and allowable dredging overdepth.			

5.6.4 Alternative 4 - Combination of Measures EC1 and BI1 (Alternatives 1 and 2)

See Sections 5.6.1 and 5.6.2 for a description.

5.6.5 Alternative 5 - Combination of Measures EC1 and AB1 (Alternatives 1 and 3)

See Sections 5.6.1 and 5.6.3 for a description.

5.6.6 Alternative 6 - Combination of Measures BI1 and AB1 (Alternatives 2 and 3)

See Sections 5.6.2 and 5.6.3 for a description.

5.6.7 Alternative 7 - Combination of Measures EC1, BI1, and AB1 (Alternatives 1, 2, and 3)

See Sections 5.6.1, 5.6.2, and 5.6.3 for a description.

5.7 Screening and Evaluation of Final Array of Alternatives

Evaluation of the final array of alternatives was used to demonstrate the positive and negative effects of each alternative. The System of Accounts defined by the Principles and Guidelines (para. 1.6.2(c)) was used to compare alternatives. System of Accounts data are provided in tabular form to allow side-by-side comparison of the No Action Plan, and all final alternatives. The four accounts used to compare proposed water resource development plans are the national economic development (NED), environmental quality (EQ), regional economic development (RED), and other social effects (OSE) accounts.

The plans were further compared with the planning opportunities and four formulation criteria suggested by the U.S. Water Resources Council. The criteria are completeness, effectiveness, efficiency, and acceptability.

Completeness. Completeness is the extent to which an alternative plan provides and accounts for all necessary investments or other actions to ensure the realization of the planned effects. That could require relating the plan to other types of public or private plans if the other plans are crucial to achieving the contributions to the objective.

Effectiveness. All the plans in the final array provide some contribution to the planning objectives. Effectiveness is defined as a measure of the extent to which a plan achieves its objectives.

Efficiency. All the plans in the final array provide net benefits. Efficiency is a measure of the plan's cost-effectiveness expressed in net benefits.

Acceptability. All the plans in the final array must be in accordance with Federal law and policy. Acceptability is defined in terms of acceptance of the plan by the non-Federal sponsor and the concerned public.

Table 5.5 presents a comparison of the system of accounts, planning opportunities, and formulation criteria for the three stand-alone alternatives in the final array (Alternatives 1-3) and the No Action alternative. Alternatives consisting of a combination of measures (Alternatives 4-7) would simply be the combination of the costs and benefits of each individual measure (Alternatives 1-3 in Table 5.5).

Table 5.5. System of accounts, planning opportunities, and formulation criteria for each of the alternatives in the final array.

Criteria	No Action Alternative	Entrance Channel, Reach 1 Alternative 1	Battery Island Turn Alternative 2	Anchorage Basin Alternative 3
1. Planning objectives				
Meets planning objective(s) specific for that location	No	Yes - Reduces vessel transit times and potentially future dredging costs through the Entrance Channel, Reach 1.	Yes - Reduces the transit times needed for larger vessels to negotiate the Battery Island Turn portion of the navigation channel.	Yes - Reduces the time it takes for larger vessels currently calling on the Port to turn in the Anchorage Basin and create adequate width in the Anchorage Basin to allow for the turning of even larger vessels (post-Panamax) which may call on the Port in the future.
2. System of Accounts				
National Economic Development				
Average Annual Cost	N/A	$0	$584,900	$3,518,000
Average Annual Benefits	N/A	Unable to calculate	$1,253,000	$195000
B/C Ratio	N/A	Unable to calculate	2.14	0.06
Total First Cost	N/A	Onetime $2,364,790 reduction in O&M costs in first dredging cycle	$14,424,000	$37,901,000

Criteria		No Action Alternative	Entrance Channel, Reach 1 Alternative	Battery Island Turn Alternative	Anchorage Basin Alternative
Environmental Quality					
Estuarine & Marine Environment	*Dredging Impacts on Benthic Resources*	Impacts similar to proposed actions except no new areas will be dredged.	Short term impacts to benthic macro-invertebrates associated with dredging new and existing channel area. Risk of demersal fish entrainment by dredging activities.	Short term impacts to benthic macro-invertebrates associated with dredging new and existing channel area. Risk of demersal fish entrainment by dredging activities.	Short term impacts to benthic macro-invertebrates associated with dredging new and existing channel area. Risk of demersal fish entrainment by dredging activities.
	Placement Impacts on Benthic Resources-Beach and Surf Zone	Impacts similar to proposed actions.	Short term and localized impact to surf zone benthic macro-invertebrate community from direct burial and turbidity associated with beach placement of sediment. *	Disposal will be in the ODMDS. Impacts associated with placement in the ODMDS have been addressed in EPA's Final EIS (USEPA 2001).	N/A. Placement in Eagle Island
	Turbidity	Impacts similar to proposed actions.	Short term impacts to adult, larval, and juvenile surf zone fishes from elevated turbidity levels associated with dredging and beach placement. *	Short term impacts to adult, larval, and juvenile fishes from elevated turbidity levels associated with dredging. Placement will be in the ODMDS.	Short term impacts to adult, larval, and juvenile fishes from elevated turbidity levels associated with dredging. Placement will be in Eagle Island.

* The portion of the Entrance Channel, Reach 1 sediments not suitable for beach placement will be disposed into the ODMDS. Impacts of that placement action will be similar to the impacts of placement of the Battery Island Turn sediments into the ODMDS.

Criteria		No Action Alternative	Entrance Channel Alternative	Battery Island Turn Alternative	Anchorage Basin Alternative
Environmental Quality (cont.)					
	EFH-HAPC	Impacts similar to proposed actions except no new areas will be impacted	Short term impacts to water column due to elevated turbidity level from dredging and placement.	Short term impacts to water column due to elevated turbidity level from dredging and placement.	Loss of 4.8 acres of primary nursery area (PNA) and 12.6 acres of vegetated wetlands due to dredging of expanded basin.
Terrestrial Environment	*Beach and Dune*	Impacts similar to proposed actions.	Short term impacts to portions of the existing dune vegetation during construction. Long term sustainability of dune habitat for nesting sea turtles and other dependent mammal and avian species. Short term impacts to ghost crabs and their beach and dune habitat with long term sustainability of habitat.*	N/A. Placement in the ODMDS	N/A. Placement in Eagle Island.
	Shorebird Habitat	Impacts similar to proposed actions	Short term impacts to shorebird foraging due to a temporary reduction in surf zone macro-invertebrate forage base associated with construction and maintenance. Prevention of overwash fan habitat for shorebirds from constructed dune.*	N/A. Placement in the ODMDS	N/A. Placement in Eagle Island.

* The portion of the Entrance Channel, Reach 1 sediments not suitable for beach placement will be disposed into the ODMDS. Impacts of that placement action will be similar to the impacts of placement of the Battery Island Turn sediments into the ODMDS

Criteria		No Action Alternative	Entrance Channel Alternative	Battery Island Turn Alternative	Anchorage Basin Alternative
Environmental Quality (cont.)					
Threatened and Endangered Species Terrestrial Environment	*Sea Turtles*	Impacts similar to proposed actions.	Short term decrease in sea turtle nest success associated with changes to the physical characteristics of the beach. Long term sustainability of sea turtle nesting habitat due to preservation of the beach berm Long term reduction of beach lighting impacts to sea turtles from constructed dune. Risk of sea turtle entrainment from hopper dredge.*	N/A. Placement in the ODMDS Except risk of sea turtle entrainment from hopper dredge.	Low probability of sea turtles being in the vicinity of the Anchorage Basin.
	Sea Beach Amaranth	Impacts similar to proposed actions.	Deep burial of seeds during construction and maintenance may slow germination and population recovery over the short-term. Long term benefits of increased available sea beach amaranth habitat.*	N/A. Placement in the ODMDS.	N/A. Placement in Eagle Island

* The portion of the Entrance Channel, Reach 1 sediments not suitable for beach placement will be disposed into the ODMDS. Impacts of that placement action will be similar to the impacts of placement of the Battery Island Turn sediments into the ODMDS

Criteria		No Action Alternative	Entrance Channel Alternative	Battery Island Turn Alternative	Anchorage Basin Alternative
Environmental Quality (cont.)					
Threatened and Endangered Species Terrestrial Environment (cont.)	*Atlantic Sturgeon*	Impacts similar to proposed actions.	Risk of Atlantic sturgeon entrainment from hopper dredge.	Risk of Atlantic sturgeon entrainment from hopper dredge.	Risk of Atlantic sturgeon entrainment from hopper dredge.
	Shortnose Sturgeon	Impacts similar to proposed actions.	Risk of shortnose sturgeon entrainment from hopper dredge.	Risk of shortnose sturgeon entrainment from hopper dredge.	Risk of shortnose sturgeon entrainment from hopper dredge.
	Piping Plover	Impacts similar to proposed actions.	Short term impact to piping plover foraging, sheltering, and roosting areas. Long term preservation of these areas *.	N/A. Placement in the ODMDS.	N/A. Placement in Eagle Island.
	Red Knot	Impacts similar to proposed actions.	Short term impact to Red Knot foraging, sheltering, and roosting areas. Long term preservation of these areas*.	N/A. Placement in the ODMDS.	N/A. Placement in Eagle Island.
Cultural Resources		Impacts unlikely since no new areas will be dredged.	Slight risk of encountering resources associated with dredging areas since they have been surveyed.	Slight risk of encountering resources associated with dredging areas since they have been surveyed.	High risk of encountering 3 historic properties associated with expansion of the Anchorage Basin.
Mitigation		No mitigation required.	No mitigation anticipated.	No mitigation anticipated.	Mitigation required for the loss of 4.8 acres of PNA and 12.6 acres of vegetated wetlands and probably 3 historic properties due to dredging.

Water Quality	Impacts similar to proposed actions except no new areas will be dredged.	Short term and localized elevated turbidity and suspended solid levels near the dredging equipment and in the surf zone.*	Short term and localized elevated turbidity and suspended solid levels near the dredging equipment. Placement in the ODMDS.	Short term and localized elevated turbidity and suspended solid levels near the dredging equipment. Placement will be in Eagle Island.

* The portion of the Entrance Channel, Reach 1 sediments not suitable for beach placement will be disposed into the ODMDS. Impacts of that placement action will be similar to the impacts of placement of the Battery Island Turn sediments into the ODMDS.

Criteria	No Action Alternative	Entrance Channel Alternative	Battery Island Turn Alternative	Anchorage Basin Alternative
Environmental Quality (cont.)				
Air Quality	Impacts similar to proposed actions.	Temporary air pollutant increase associated with dredging and heavy equipment use during initial construction and during maintenance events.	Temporary air pollutant increase associated with dredging and heavy equipment use during initial construction and during maintenance events.	Temporary air pollutant increase associated with dredging and heavy equipment use during initial construction and during maintenance events.
Noise Quality	Impacts similar to proposed actions.	Temporary noise increase associated with dredging and heavy equipment use during initial construction and during maintenance events.	Temporary noise increase associated with dredging and heavy equipment use during initial construction and during maintenance events.	Temporary noise increase associated with dredging and heavy equipment use during initial construction and during maintenance events.
Recreation and Aesthetic Resources	Impacts similar to proposed actions.	Improved appearance of beach would enhance recreational experience, and wider berm would increase recreational area. Temporary inconvenience to beach users during initial construction and future maintenance, although these would occur during low visitation months (Winter).*	N/A. Placement in the ODMDS.	N/A. Placement in Eagle Island.

* The portion of the Entrance Channel, Reach 1 sediments not suitable for beach placement will be disposed into the ODMDS. Impacts of that placement action will be similar to the impacts of placement of the Battery Island Turn sediments into the ODMDS.

Criteria	No Action Alternative	Entrance Channel Alternative	Battery Island Turn Alternative	Anchorage Basin Alternative
Other Social Effects (OSE)				
Health and Safety	Same as existing condition	Same as existing condition	May reduce difficulty of turn	May reduce difficulty of turn
Job security and Economic Vitality	No benefit to job security as fleet forecast is the same for with and without action	No benefit to job security as fleet forecast is the same for with and without action	No benefit to job security as fleet forecast is the same for with and without action	No benefit to job security as fleet forecast is the same for with and without action
Effects on education, cultural, and recreational opportunities	No benefits to education, cultural, and recreational opportunities	No benefits to education, cultural, and recreational opportunities	No benefits to education, cultural, and recreational opportunities	No benefits to education, cultural, and recreational opportunities
Regional Economic Development				
Impact on Gross Regional Product	N/A	N/A	$11,978,900	$35,015,300
Impact on Income	N/A	N/A	$9,064,000	$26,494,700
Impact on Employment	N/A	N/A	180 jobs	526 jobs

Criteria	No Action Alternative	Entrance Channel Alternative	Battery Island Turn Alternative	Anchorage Basin Alternative
3. Evaluation Criteria				
Acceptability	The No Action Plan would continue to be acceptable to state and local entities and is compliant with existing laws, regulations, and policies. This plan is the least satisfactory to the local maritime community.	The alternative is acceptable to state and local entities and is compliant with existing laws, regulations, and policies. As a result of a onetime cost savings, this alternative is preferred over the No Action plan.	The alternative is acceptable to state and local entities and is compliant with existing laws, regulations, and policies. As a result of reduced wait times for vessels calling on the Port of Wilmington, this alternative is preferred over the No Action plan.	The alternative is acceptable to state and local entities and is compliant with existing laws, regulations, and policies. However, there will be environmental impacts that would require mitigation and benefit/cost ratios are unacceptable.
Completeness	No Action would not be a complete solution to navigation problem identified in the navigation corridor.	This alternative is considered a complete solution for the investment at this location (Entrance Channel, Reach 1). It does not however provide a solution for navigation issues in the other problem areas.	This alternative is considered a complete solution for the investment at this location (Battery Island Turn). It does not however provide a solution for navigation issues in the other problem areas.	This alternative is considered a complete solution for the investment at this location (Anchorage Basin). It does not however provide a solution for navigation issues in the other problem areas.
Effectiveness	The No Action Plan would maintain current level of effectiveness.	This alternative is considered an effective solution for the investment at this location (Entrance Channel, Reach 1). It does not however provide a solution for navigation issues in the other problem areas.	This alternative is considered an effective solution for the investment at this location (Battery Island Turn). It does not however provide a solution for navigation issues in the other problem areas.	This alternative is considered an effective solution for the investment at this location (Anchorage Basin). It does not however provide a solution for navigation issues in the other problem areas.
Efficiency	The No Action Plan does not contribute to planning objectives.	Most cost effective alternative for meeting the planning objective for this area. This alternative provides a onetime cost savings.	Most cost effective alternative for meeting the planning objective for this area. This alternative has a benefit-cost ratio above unity.	Most cost effective alternative for meeting the planning objective for this area. This alternative does not have benefit-cost ratio above unity.

5.8 National Economic Development (NED) Plan

The National Economic Development (NED) Plan consists of Alternative 2: the Battery Island Turn (Section 5.5.2). This alternative has a benefit-cost ratio of 2.1 to 1 (Table 5.5).

5.9 Locally Preferred Plan (LPP)

The Locally Preferred Plan (LPP) is the plan that differs from the NED plan and, in the opinion of the state best meets the needs of the local community. To date, the State of North Carolina has not identified an LPP.

5.10 Recommended Plan

The Recommended Plan is Alternative 4; the Entrance Channel, Reach 1 (Alternative 1) (Section 5.5.1) which provides a one-time O&M cost savings to the Wilmington Harbor 96 Act, NC Project, and the Battery Island Turn widening (Alternative 2) (Section 5.5.2) which is the NED plan.

6.0 THE RECOMMENDED PLAN

6.1 Plan Description and Components

The Recommended Plan contains both the Entrance Channel, Reach 1 realignment and the Battery Island Turn widening described above (Section 5).

The Recommended Plan would realign the entrance channel up to 150 feet to the west of the existing channel, away from the shoal that forms on the east side of the channel. This would result in a one-time reduction in 181,000 cy dredged during the next regular O&M cycle. The realignment would not reduce the littoral sediment flow into the channel or the rate at which the channel will shoal, except during an approximate single cycle of dredging.

The Recommended Plan would also widen the Battery Island Channel from 500 feet to 750 feet, provide a 750 foot wide by about 1,300 foot long cutoff between Battery Island and Lower Swash Channels, and provide additional tapers where Southport and Lower Swash channels join the widened Battery Island Channel. These modifications to the existing channel would increase the available turning radius from approximately 2,850 feet to approximately 3,900 feet. Initial construction would generate approximately 498,700 cy of dredged material. All material removed from Battery Island Turn would be placed in the ODMDS.

The project first cost for the Recommended Plan is $14,424,000. There is no cost associated with the modification to the Entrance Channel, as the cost would continue to be the routine O&M cost already associated with the channel maintenance. For the first dredging cycle, there would be a one-time cost savings to the Wilmington Harbor Deep Draft Navigation Project O&M of approximately $2,364,790 as a result of decreased quantities of sediment requiring removal to achieve authorized channel dimensions. As a result, there is no B/C ratio associated with the Entrance Channel. The Battery Island Turn increment of the Recommended Plan provides over $1,253,000 in average annual benefits at an average annual cost of $584,900 a B/C ratio of 2.14.

6.2 Design and Construction Considerations

The Recommended Plan would be constructed by private contractors under contract to the Federal Government. Estimated construction period is 6 months for the Battery Island Turn. The Entrance Channel, Reach 1 relocation would occur during the first dredging cycle after the completion of plans and specifications (Table 11.1). For the Battery Island Turn, all sediments dredged during initial construction and maintenance would be placed in the Wilmington ODMDS (Figure 1.1) because of the high percentage of fine grained sediments and because the dredged material may contain some rock and cemented sand. The rock and cemented sand is not hard enough to require blasting (Figure 1.1). The schedule (Table 11.1) is subject to change if it is determined that the Recommended Plan can be constructed under the existing authorization for Wilmington Harbor.

6.3 Real Estate Considerations

No acquisition of real estate interest is required for the realignment of the Entrance Channel, Reach 1 or for widening of the turn at Battery Island. As the project has a nexus to commerce and navigation, the Government will exercise its rights under navigation

servitude to construct the project. No staging or temporary work areas are required. Real Estate considerations for areas designated for beach placements were addressed under the Wilmington Harbor '96 Act Project.

6.4 Operation and Maintenance Considerations

Federal O&M of the Entrance Channel, Reach 1 and the Battery Island Turn is expected to be accomplished under the Wilmington Harbor '96 Act, NC Project.

6.5 Placement Areas

Dredged material from construction of the Battery Island Turn will be placed in the EPA-designated Wilmington ODMDS. The use of the site will be in accordance with the current Wilmington ODMDS Site Management and Monitoring Plan (SMMP). The site is located approximately five nautical miles (nmi) offshore Bald Head Island, North Carolina. The Wilmington ODMDS has an area of about 9.4 square nautical miles (nmi^2). Depths within the ODMDS range from about -35 to -52 feet local MLLW. The dredged material from the relocation of the Entrance Channel, Reach 1 would be used to return beach compatible sediment back to the adjacent beach system where compatible in accordance with the 2000 EA Sand Management Plan (Appendix H). Dredged material not suitable for beach placement will be placed in the Wilmington ODMDS.

6.6 Plan Accomplishments

Entrance Channel, Reach 1

There will be a one-time reduction in maintenance dredging. The reduction in maintenance dredging is achieved by moving the channel away from a recurring shoal into naturally deep water.

Battery Island Channel Improvements

There will be improved channel geometry at the Battery Island Channel. The proposed plan effectively increases the radius of the turn by providing a widener in the Battery Island Channel reach and providing tapers that extend into the adjacent channel reaches.

6.7 Without- and With-project

The without-project condition consists of those future conditions most likely to prevail in the absence of the proposed project. The base year for this project is 2018 when the proposed alternatives will be fully functional and starts generating benefits continuing to year 2067.

6.7.1 Environment

The future without-project condition with regard to environmental resources is expected to be similar to the existing condition described in Section 2.

6.7.2 Economics

It is assumed that the commodity flows and the fleet composition are the same in the without-project and the with-project condition.

Entrance Channel

The proposed movement of the Entrance Channel to follow deep water will reduce maintenance costs by approximately $2,364,790 during the first dredging cycle through a reduction in quantity of material that will require dredging.

Battery Island Turn

The pilots indicated that vessels drafting over 36 feet must wait for high tide to navigate around Battery Island. This practice is expected to continue with the introduction of post-Panamax vessels in the fleet mix. A tug requirement is also expected for the post-Panamax vessels in the without-project condition. A deficiency in the channel width for the larger vessels has been confirmed. Therefore, in the without-project condition modeling indicated vessels drafting greater than 36 feet would wait for tide to navigate Battery Island Turn and post-Panamax vessels would require a tug to assist in the turn. Tidal availability is approximately four feet twice a day.

It is assumed in the With Project Condition that vessels drafting greater than 36 feet do not have to wait for tide and post-Panamax vessels do not need tug assist around the turn because the turn will be widened to 750 feet. When taking the cost savings and multiplying by the vessel type, the transportation cost savings for the year are calculated. Using the FY16 discount rate of 3.125% over a 50-year period of analysis, the average annual transportation cost saving benefits are $1,108,000.

Tug Assist Benefits

The Battery Island Turn easing has another benefit component. The Future Without-Project Condition assumes post-Panamax vessels will need tug assistance in addition to tide when navigating around Battery Island. By widening the turn to 750 feet, tug assistance will no longer be needed for the post-Panamax vessels. The With Project Condition does not assume the tug will be removed from the harbor for not being needed, therefore, only variable operating costs of the tug will be used for benefit. The variable costs were calculated using the crew costs of one captain and two crew members. The number of crew members was provided by the tug company as well as the fuel cost.

An average fuel cost was calculated by using diesel fuel prices for the past five years. The tug company estimates six hours of time needed for a tug to help post-Panamax vessels around the Battery Island Turn, using 100 gallons of fuel per hour. Based on the vessel call lists, the maximum number of post-Panamax vessel transits is 63. The benefits by year were calculated by taking the crew cost for six hours ($375) plus the fuel cost for six hours ($1,932) times the number of transits of post-Panamax vessels (63). The average annual benefit for reduction in tug assistance is $137,000.

Table 6.1 shows the costs and benefits for the Battery Island Turn widening.

Table 6.1. Battery Island Costs and Benefits

Total Benefits	$31,492,000
Average Annual Transportation Cost Savings Benefits	$1,108,000
Average Annual Reduction in Tug Assist Benefits	$137,000
Total Average Annual Benefits	$1,253,000
Project Cost	$14,424,000
Interest During Construction	$224
Total Investment Cost	$14,648,000
Average Annual Project Cost	$583,000
Average Annual O&M	$1,970
Average Annual Cost	$585,000
Net Benefits	$660,000
BCR	2.14

6.8 Cost Summary of Recommended Plan

The estimated project initial cost for the Recommended Plan is $14,424,000, based on October 2015 price levels. The fully-funded project cost is $15,936,000, escalated to an estimated construction mid-point date of 4th quarter 2019 (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2. Cost Summary

Item	**First Cost ($1,000s)**	**Fully Funded ($1,000s)**
PED	$724	$857
Construction	$13,167	$14,445
Land And Damages	$11	$10
Construction Management	$522	$624
Total Project Cost	**$ 14,424**	**$ 15,936**

7.0 ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The following section discusses and compares the environmental effects of the Recommended Plan and the No Action alternative in the Wilmington Harbor project area. The Wilmington Harbor navigation channels are to be maintained to their authorized depth, but some widening and channel relocation is proposed to reduce ship transport and maintenance costs. A complete project description is found in Section 6.0, The Recommended Plan.

The affected environment of the project includes the area bordering the navigation channels around Battery Island, the Entrance Channel, the beaches and nearshore waters of Bald Head Island and Oak Island/Caswell Beach, and the Wilmington ODMDS.

Table 5.5 summarizes and compares the potential environmental effects of the Recommended Plan and the No Action alternative. Areas of no or inconsequential impact are not included in the table.

7.1 Sediments and Erosion

Wilmington Harbor Entrance Channel, Reach 1: Moving the channel westward was analyzed as a way of obtaining a one-time reduction in the volume dredged. The reduction is a one-time occurrence since moving the channel does not reduce the littoral sediment flow into the channel or the rate at which the channel will shoal. A volume reduction can be obtained by moving the channel to the west away from the shoal that forms on the east side of the channel until the channel starts to cut into the bank on the west side of the channel. That would offset reductions obtained from the move away from the shoal on the east side of the channel.

As described in Section 6.0, dredged material historically accumulated in the existing Entrance Channel – Reach 1. The dredged material has been beach compatible and can be placed on the beach during future dredge cycles. The material sampled within the proposed Entrance Channel - Reach 1, or “virgin” material that is outside the existing channel footprint, is not beach compatible and shall not be considered for beach placement. This dredged material will be disposed of in the designated Wilmington ODMDS (Figure 5.5).

Battery Island Turn: With the proposed alignment, the shoaling rate within the turn is expected to be similar to current rates because the forces that form the impeding shoals would continue to be similar. Projected shoaling rates for the turns thru the Battery Island Channel (includes northern part of Southport Channel and southern part of Lower Swash Channel) are estimated at 17,000 cubic yards per year. The basis for the estimate is dredging pay quantities over the dredging events that have taken place from 2008 to 2015.

As described in Section 6.0, all sediments dredged during initial construction and maintenance will be placed in the Wilmington ODMDS because the sediments contain a high percentage of silt and may contain some rock and cemented sand. The rock and cemented sand is not hard enough to require blasting. The vessel-induced waves along the Southport shoreline are not expected to be significantly changed from the existing condition by implementing the proposed modifications. The southern shore of Battery Island could experience somewhat higher ship waves since the wider channel is closer (increase wave heights by about 14%), however for existing vessel speeds, a 14% wave

height increase is less than 1.5 inches and is considered negligible. See Appendix B for details.

No Action: Impacts are expected to be similar to the proposed action except no new areas will be dredged.

7.2 Water Resources

7.2.1 Hydrology

Due to the relatively minor modifications in the channel alignment or width at the Battery Island Turn and the Entrance Channel, Reach 1, no appreciable change in hydrology is anticipated.

No Action: No appreciable change to hydrology would result with implementation of the No Action Alternative.

7.2.2 Water Quality.

Entrance Channel, Reach 1: During construction, there would be elevated turbidity and suspended solids in the immediate area of dredging and sand deposition on the beaches when compared to the existing non-storm conditions of the surf zone. Significant increases in turbidity are not expected to occur outside the immediate construction/maintenance area (turbidity increases of 25 NTU or less are not considered significant). Turbid waters (increased turbidity relative to background levels but not necessarily above 25 NTUs) would hug the shore and be transported with waves either up-drift or down-drift depending on wind conditions. Because of the low percentage of silt and clay being pumped to the beach, turbidity impacts would not be expected to be greater than the natural increase in turbidity and suspended material that occurs during storm events and existing placement events.

During dredging, there would be elevated turbidity and suspended solids in the immediate area of the dredge and in the overflow of scows or hopper dredges to obtain an economic load, if that type of equipment is used. Any increases in turbidity in the navigation channel during project construction and maintenance would be expected to be temporary and limited to the area surrounding the dredging. Turbidity levels would be expected to return to background levels in the navigation channel and surf zone when dredging ends.

Therefore, no appreciable change in water quality is anticipated in the navigation channel or adjacent beaches due to the proposed project. Maintenance dredging is occurring frequently in the navigation channel now along with placement of beach quality sand on adjacent beaches in accordance with the EA SMP (2000).

No Action: The No Action Alternative will have similar impacts to the proposed action except that no new areas will be dredged with No Action.

A Section 401 Water Quality Certificate under the Clean Water Act of 1977 (P.L. 95-217), as amended, is required for the proposed beach placement and would be obtained from the NCDWR before construction begins. This project will use the North Carolina Division of Water Quality's March 19, 2012, Water Quality Certification No. 3908: General Certification for Projects Eligible for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Regional General Permit 198000048 Involving Disposal of Dredged Material on Ocean Beaches within

North Carolina. It is not anticipated that there will be any issues in obtaining the certification.

Battery Island Turn: During dredging, there would be elevated turbidity and suspended solids in the immediate area of the dredge and in the overflow of scows or hopper dredges to obtain an economic load, if that type of equipment is used. For the dredging, any increases in turbidity in the navigation channel during project construction and maintenance would be expected to be temporary and limited to the area surrounding the dredging. Turbidity levels would be expected to return to background levels in the navigation channel when dredging ends.

For spider barge operation, a study was performed in Wilmington Harbor in 2002 (Reine et al. 2002) monitoring the fate of the overflow from a spider barge operation. This study was conducted in the Keg Island and Lower Big Island Channels about 16 miles upstream of the Battery Island Turn. The study was conducted during ebb and flood tide cycles and indicated that the elevated turbidity values from overflow of the scows were confined to the navigation channel. Turbidity values in the plume nearest spider barge operation reached a maximum of 128 NTU (nephelometric turbidity units) but decreased rapidly down current. Turbidity samples collected over shallow areas adjacent to the navigation channel during dredging averaged less than 30 NTU with a peak of 41 NTU at one station. These latter values were similar to background values in the shallow areas.

Based on this study (Reine et al. 2002), the Wilmington District has received all the required environmental clearances to use spider barge operations in Wilmington Harbor downstream of the mouth of the Brunswick River. The Battery Island Turn is about 19 miles downstream of the mouth of the Brunswick River. Use of spider barge operations in the Battery Island Turn should be similar to the Keg Island and Lower Big Island Channels since those latter channels average about 37% silt and the Battery Island Turn has comparable silt content.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.2.3 Groundwater

Entrance Channel, Reach 1: Dredging with beach placement of material would not be expected to adversely affect groundwater of the area. Saltwater intrusion into the groundwater is the only potential concern, but none of the dredging will be deeper than the existing navigation channel and placement on the beaches will occur in an existing saltwater environment.

Battery Island Turn: Dredging is not expected to adversely affect groundwater of the area. Saltwater intrusion into the groundwater is the only potential concern, but none of the dredging will be deeper than the existing navigation channel.

No Action: No appreciable change to groundwater would result with implementation of the No Action Alternative.

7.3 Air Quality

Temporary increases in exhaust emissions from construction equipment are expected during dredging, dredged material placement, and maintenance operations. The State of North Carolina does have a State Implementation Plan (SIP) approved or promulgated

under Section 110 of the Clean Air Act, as amended. However, a conformity determination is not required because Brunswick County has been designated by the State of North Carolina as an attainment area, and the direct and indirect emissions from the project fall below the prescribed de minimus levels (58 Fed. Reg. 93.153(c)(1)) and; therefore, no conformity determination would be required.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.4 Marine and Estuarine Resources

7.4.1 Nekton

Surf Zone Fishes

Entrance Channel, Reach 1 (Battery Island Turn does not involve beach placement): The surf zone is a dynamic environment, and the community structure of organisms that inhabit it (e.g., surf zone fishes and invertebrates) is complex. Representative organisms of both finfish and the invertebrate inhabitants they consume exhibit similar recruitment periods. In North Carolina, the majority of invertebrate species recruit between May and September (Hackney et al. 1996, Diaz 1980, Reilly and Bellis 1978), and surf zone fish species recruit from March through September (Hackney et al. 1996). The anticipated construction time frame for the project is from December 1 to March 31 and would avoid a majority of the peak recruitment and abundance periods of surf zone fishes and their benthic invertebrate prey source.

The surf zone represents a HAPC for some species, including adult bluefish and red drum, which feed extensively in that portion of the ocean. The surf zone is suggested to be an important migratory area for larval/juvenile fish moving in and out of inlets and estuarine nurseries (Hackney et al. 1996). Placement operations along the beach can result in increased turbidity and mortality of intertidal macrofauna, which serves as food sources for those and other species. However, during placement operations, the dredged material slurry is managed through the construction of dikes to allow for a larger settling time and reduction of turbidity loads into the surf zone environment. Though mitigation efforts are undertaken to reduce turbidity loads, elevated NTU levels are still anticipated at the immediate placement area sites. Therefore, feeding activities of the species could be interrupted in the immediate area of beach sand placement. Mobile fish species are expected to temporarily relocate to other areas as the project proceeds along the beach. However, some species like Florida pompano and Gulf kingfish exhibit strong site fidelity during the middle portion (summer) of the nursery period (Ross and Lancaster 2002) and might not avoid secondary effects (turbidity) of placement. Because the project would avoid impacts to the surf zone during the summer months, it is expected that the project would not affect this period of strong site fidelity. Although a short-term reduction in prey availability could occur in the immediate placement area, only a small area is affected at a time, and once complete, organisms can recruit into the nourished area. Such a recovery would begin immediately after placement activity if the material is similar to the native beach (see Benthic Resources—Beach and Surf Zone Section 7.4.2).

According to Ross (1996) some surf zone fishes exhibit prey switching in relation to prey availability. Therefore, during periods of low prey availability, as a result of short-term impacts to the benthic invertebrate population during beach placement activities, surf zone

fishes may temporarily use alternative food sources. Considering the dynamic nature of the surf zone, such opportunistic behavior of avoidance and prey switching might enable some surf zone fishes to adapt to disturbances such as beach nourishment. A combination of short-term prey switching and temporary relocation capabilities may help mitigate short-term prey reductions during beach placement operations. Once the placement operation is finished, physical conditions in the impact zone quickly recover and biological recovery soon follows. Surf-feeding fish can then resume their normal activities in the areas. That is supported in Ross and Lancaster's (2002) study in which Florida pompano and Gulf kingfish appeared to remain near a recently nourished beach as long as a beach that was not recently nourished.

Placement and subsequent turbidity increases may have short-term effects on surf zone fishes and prey availability. However, the opportunistic behavior of the organisms within the dynamic surf zone environment enables them to adapt to short-term disturbances. Because of the adaptive ability of representative organisms in the area and the avoidance of peak recruitment and abundance time frames with a December 1 to March 31 construction time frame, such effects would be expected to be temporary and minor.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

Larval Fish Entrainment

Entrance Channel, Reach 1 and Battery Island Turn: For many marine fishes, spawning grounds are believed to occur on the continental shelf with immigration to estuaries during the juvenile stage through active or passive transport. According to Hettler and Hare (1998), research suggests two bottlenecks that occur for offshore-spawning fishes with estuarine juveniles: the transport of larvae into the nearshore zone and the transport of larvae into the estuary from the nearshore zone. During that immigration period from offshore to inshore environments, the highest concentration of larvae generally occurs in the inlets as the larvae approach the second bottleneck into the estuary. Once through the inlet, the shelter provided by the marsh and creek systems in the sound serve as nursery habitat where young fish undergo rapid growth before returning to the offshore environment.

Susceptibility to entrainment by a dredge is largely dependent on proximity to the cutter-head or drag arm, and the pumping rate of the dredge. Those larvae present near the bottom would be closer to the dredge area and would, therefore, be subject to higher risk of entrainment. Assessment of the significance of the entrainment is difficult. Assuming the very small volumes of water pumped by dredges relative to the total amount of water in the dredging vicinity, a small proportion of organisms are presumed to be affected. Potential reasons for low levels of impact include the extremely large numbers of larvae produced by most estuarine-dependent species and the extremely high natural mortality rate for early life stages of many fish species. Because natural larval mortalities might approach 99 % (Dew and Hecht 1994, Cushing 1988), entrainment by a hydraulic dredge would not be expected to pose a significant additional risk in most circumstances.

An assessment of potential entrainment effects of the proposed dredging action may be viewed in a more site-specific context by comparing the pumping rate of a dredge with the amount of water present in the affected water body. For the purposes of this assessment, assumptions would be made that inlet bottlenecks would have the highest concentrations

of larvae as they are transported into the estuarine environment from the nearshore zone. The distribution, abundance, seasonality, transport, and ingress of larval fish at Beaufort Inlet, North Carolina, has been extensively studied (Blanton et al., 1999, Churchill et al. 1999, Hettler and Barker 1993, Hettler and Chester 1990, Hettler and Hare 1998). Therefore, it represents a good case study site for assessing larval entrainment of a hydraulic dredge. The largest hydraulic dredge likely to work in the navigation channel would have a discharge pipe about 30 inches in diameter and would be capable of transporting about 30,600 m3 of sand per day (assuming 1 mile of travel) if operated 24 hours (because of breakdown, weather, and the like, dredges generally do not work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week). The dredged sediment would be pumped as slurry containing about 15% sand and about 85% water by volume. The volume of water discharged would, thus, be about 173,000 m3 per day, or about 2.0 m3 per second. In contrast, the calculated spring tide flow through Beaufort Inlet is approximately 142,000,000 m3 × 2 = 284,000,000 m3 (i.e., two tides a day) of water and 264,000,000 m3 during neap tide. Thus, the dredge would entrain only 0.06 to 0.07% of the daily volume flux through the inlet. Under the worst-case scenario with the highest concentrations of larvae possible based on spatial and temporal distribution patterns, the maximum percentage entrained barely exceeds 0.1% per day. Although any larvae entrained would likely be killed, the effect at the population level would be expected to be insignificant.

Due to the mobility of fish beyond the larval stage, entrainment is not anticipated to be a significant issue either.

Entrainment is not anticipated to be an issue for a bucket dredge, since this type of dredge removes sediment and only small amounts of water.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

Anadromous Species

As indicated in Section 2.4, anadromous species such as blueback herring, American and hickory shad, alewife, striped bass, and Atlantic and shortnose sturgeon pass through the project area to spawning areas in the upper river. Due to the mobility of these species, the dredging associated with the proposed project should not adversely impact these species. These species are not likely to be present along the beach placement areas, but if they did occur there no impacts should occur due to their mobility.

No Action: Impacts similar to proposed action.

Artificial Reefs

The NCARP manages 8 reefs that are located off Brunswick County. None are in proximity to the proposed work. The WOFES, is a reef-like community that was formed by the USACE placement of dredged rock at a location about 4 miles off Bald Head Island. None of these reefs will be impacted by the proposed dredging or placement operations.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

Primary Nursery Areas

There are no designated primary nursery areas (PNAs) in the Battery Island Turn, navigation channel or beaches in the project area. PNAs would not be expected to be directly affected by implementing the proposed project since no PNAs are located in the

project area. The Molasses, Coward, and Smokehouse Creeks PNAs are located west of the Battery Island Channel, but at least 3,500 feet away from its nearest point, and no widening is proposed on the west side of the channel.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.4.2 Benthic Resources

Beach and Surf Zone

Entrance Channel, Reach 1 (Battery Island Turn does not involve beach placement): Beach placement may have negative effects on intertidal macrofauna through direct burial, increased turbidity in the surf zone, or changes in the sand grain size or beach profile. While beach placement may produce negative effects on intertidal macrofauna, they would be localized in the vicinity of the placement operation.

In a 1999 Environmental Report on the use of Federal offshore sand resources for beach and coastal restoration, U.S. Department of Interior (DOI), Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM, Previously Minerals Management Service (MMS)) provided the following assessment of potential effects on beach fauna from beach placement.

> *Because benthic organisms living in beach habitats are adapted to living in high energy environments, they are able to quickly recover to original levels following beach nourishment events, sometimes in as little as three months (Van Dolah et al. 1994, Levisen and Van Dolah 1996). This is again attributed to the fact that intertidal organisms are living in high energy habitats where disturbances are more common. Because of a lower diversity of species compared to other intertidal and shallow sub tidal habitats (Hackney et al. 1996), the vast majority of beach habitats are re-colonized by the same species that existed before nourishment (Van Dolah et al. 1992, Nelson 1985, Levisen and Van Dolah 1996, Hackney et al. 1996).*

As a component of their review of the potential effects of beach placement on surf zone fishes and invertebrates in the South Atlantic Bight, Hackney et al. (1996) identified nine fish species and five invertebrate species/groups that are important inhabitants of the intertidal and sub tidal beach environment. According to their literature review of associated impacts to these species and how best to protect the natural resources associated with beach placement, they identified four management questions to address for each placement project: (1) project timing, (2) sediment compatibility, (3) placement duration, and (4) innovative ways to minimize effects (i.e., limiting the quantity of material placed on the beach at any one time). Those management questions were considered during planning efforts associated with the proposed dredging and beach construction efforts for this project. The proposed dredging window of December 1 through March 31 for initial construction and each placement event avoids most of the identified peak recruitment periods for surf zone fish (March through September [Hackney et al., 1996]) and invertebrate species (May through September [Hackney et al. 1996, Diaz 1980, Reilly and Bellis 1978]) in North Carolina. Beach placement would therefore be completed before the onshore recruitment of most surf zone fishes and invertebrate species. To assure compatibility of placement material with native sediment characteristics and minimize impacts to benthic invertebrates from the placement of incompatible sediment, all sediment identified for use for this project has gone through compatibility analysis and overfill ratio

calculations to assure compatibility with the native sediment (Appendix B). Also placement duration would be four months or less, which should reduce impacts on recruitment. Finally, limiting the quantity of material placed on the beach at any one time is not feasible, since the maintenance material needs to be removed all at one time to allow the channel to be maintained to the proper width and depth for vessel passage.

In summary, temporary effects on intertidal macrofauna in the immediate vicinity of the beach placement project would be expected as a result of discharges of placement material on the beach. While the proposed beach placement may adversely affect intertidal macrofauna, with the implementation of environmental measures discussed above, such effects would be expected to be localized, short-term, and reversible. Any reduction in the numbers or biomass (or both) of intertidal macrofauna present immediately after beach placement may have localized limiting effects on surf-feeding fishes and shorebirds because of a reduced food supply. In such instances, those animals may be temporarily displaced to other locations.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

Entrance Channel, Reach 1 and Battery Island Turn

Entrance Channel, Reach 1: Benthic resources in and adjacent to the navigation channel are in a constant state of flux due the maintenance dredging and ship propeller wash. The proposed channel alignment will not appreciably alter that condition.

Battery Island Turn: The widening of the Battery Island Turn will involve dredging about 35.9 acres of previously undisturbed river bottom, including side slopes (Figure 7.1). All but about 0.13 acres of this area is at or below the existing 25 foot contour at MLLW. The 0.13 acre area is on the side slopes and the shallowest depth in this area is about 14 feet MLLW. About 6.25 acres of the existing turn will be eliminated from future maintenance dredging.

While benthic resources in the maintained turn area are not likely to return to pre-dredging conditions, the benthic resources in the 6.25 acres area should improve. However, there will be an overall reduction in the benthic resources in the Battery Island Turn. The resources in this area are not significant enough to require mitigation.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action except no new areas will be dredged.

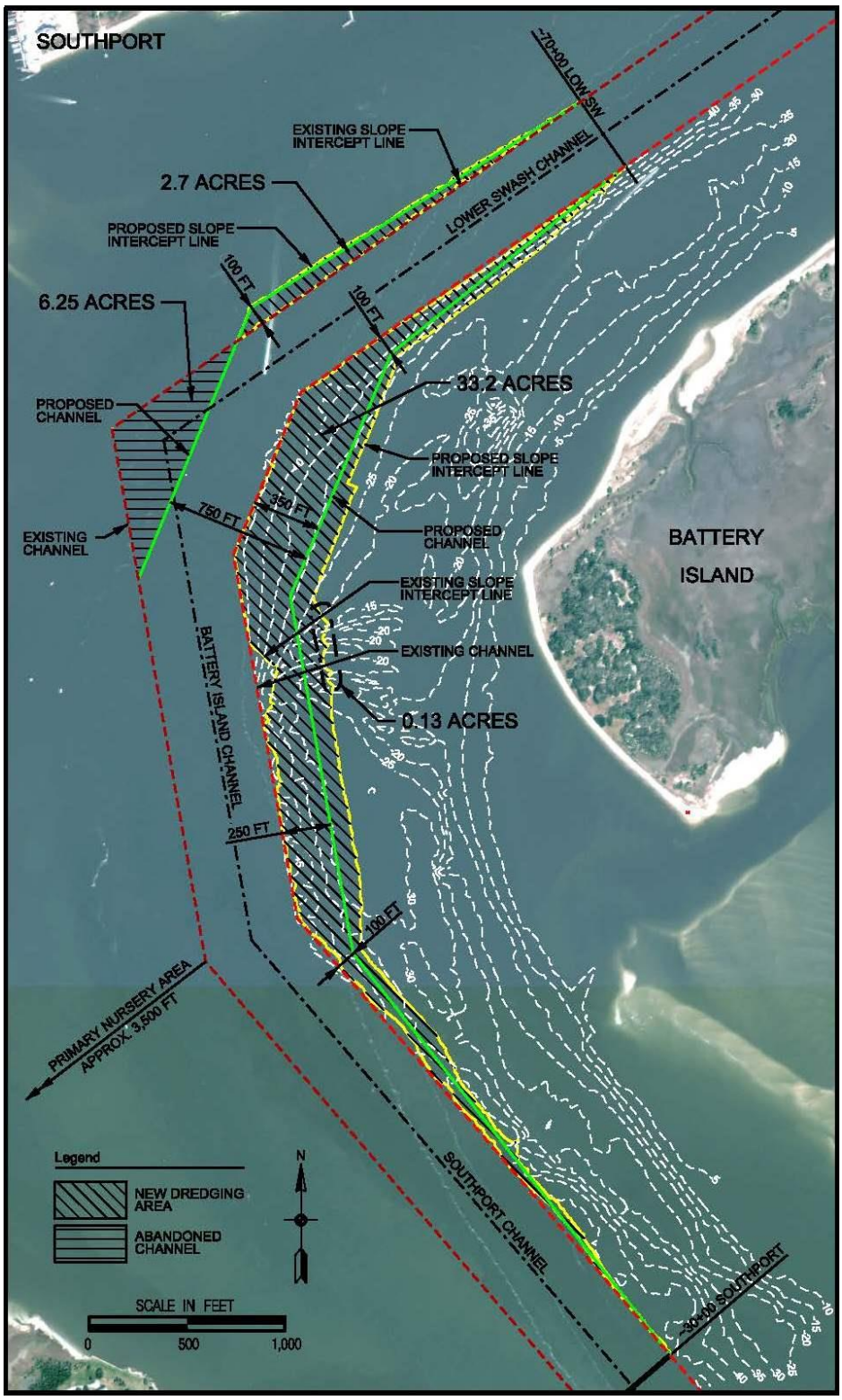


Figure 7.1. Area to be dredged at the Battery Island Turn

7.5 Essential Fish Habitat and State Managed Fish Species

Table 7.1 identifies more than 30 categories of EFH and HAPC. While all those habitat categories occur in waters of the southeastern United States, not all occur in the immediate project vicinity or the project impact zone. Effects on habitat categories potentially present in the project vicinity are discussed in the following subsections.

7.5.1 Effects on the Estuarine Water Column

Battery Island Turn and Entrance Channel, Reach 1: While the navigation channel is a part of the estuarine water column, dredging frequently occurs there and the impacts are the same as discussed in the previous section. However, the Wilmington Harbor Entrance Channel work involves beach fill. Short-term, elevated turbidity levels could occur during the placement operation and could be transported outside the immediate placement area via longshore and tidal currents. Turbidity associated with the beach placement operation could extend into the Cape Fear River inlet and the estuarine water column from longshore currents and tidal influx, but this turbidity should be of short duration and minor due to the low percentages of silt and clay in the sand placed on the beaches.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.5.2 Effects on Live/Hard Bottoms

Battery Island Turn and Entrance Channel, Reach 1: Significant quantities of sand-sized sediments placed on the beach can be transported and deposited seaward as a result of short-term erosional events and the equilibration of beach fill. Over time, the evolving profile advances seaward into deeper water until it approaches equilibrium, however, sediment particles can be in motion at greater depths than those at which profile readjustment occurs. The seaward limit of effective profile fluctuation over long-term time scales is referred to as the closure depth. On the basis of the data reviewed to date, no hard-bottom features have been identified in the expected depth of closure for the study or in the dredging areas.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.5.3 Effects on Coral and Coral Reefs

Battery Island Turn and Entrance Channel, Reach 1: Similar to Live/Hard Bottoms discussion above, on the basis of the data reviewed to date, no coral or coral reefs have been identified in the expected depth of closure for the study or in the dredging areas.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.5.4 Effects on Artificial/Manmade Reefs

The NCARP manages 8 reefs that are located off Brunswick County. None are in proximity to the proposed work. The WOFES, is a reef-like community that was formed by the USACE placement of dredged rock at a location about 4 miles off Bald Head Island. None of these reefs will be impacted by the proposed dredging or placement operations.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.5.5 Effects on Sargassum

Battery Island Turn and Entrance Channel, Reach 1: *Sargassum filipendula* is a benthic species of *Sargassum* and is often the predominant macrophyte in nearshore areas where *Sargassum* beds grow subtidally in moderately exposed or sheltered rocky or pebble areas near hard bottom or coral reef communities (Schneider et al. 1991). No such habitat exists in the project area except possibly for the WOFES. However it is over 3 miles away from the proposed dredging and placement operations.

Pelagic *Sargassum* sp. occur in large floating mats on the continental shelf, in the Sargasso Sea, and in the Gulf Stream. Most pelagic *Sargassum* circulates between 20° N and 40° N latitudes and 30° W longitude and the western edge of the Florida Current/Gulf Stream and forms a dynamic structural habitat with a diverse assemblage of marine organisms including fungi, micro- and macro-epiphytes, at least 145 species of invertebrates, 100 species of fishes, four species of sea turtle, and numerous marine birds. It is a major source of productivity in a nutrient-poor part of the ocean.

Pelagic *Sargassu*m is positively buoyant and, depending on the prevailing surface currents, would remain on the continental shelf for extended periods or be cast ashore. Therefore, pelagic *Sargassum* species could be transported inshore from the Gulfstream and drift through the vicinity of the dredge plant. Because *Sargassum* sp. occurs in the upper few feet of the water column, it is not subject to effects from dredging or sediment placement activities associated with the proposed action (SAFMC 1998.) Thus, effects from the dredging or placement operations would not be expected to be significant.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.5.6 Effects on the Marine Water Column

Battery Island Turn and Entrance Channel, Reach 1: The potential water quality effects of dredging and beach fill placement are addressed in Section 7.2. Dredging and beach fill placement conducted during project construction could create effects in the marine water column in the immediate vicinity of the activity potentially affecting the surf zone and nearshore ocean. Such effects could include minor and short-term suspended sediment plumes and related turbidity, and the release of soluble trace constituents from the sediment. The effects could be similar, on a smaller scale, to the effects of storms. Storm effects could include increased turbidity and sediment load in the water column and, in some cases, changes in fish community structure (Hackney et. al 1996). Storms of great severity, such as hurricanes, have been documented to create conditions resulting in fish kills, but such situations are not usually associated with beach placement. However, the impacts of the proposed action should be of short duration and minor due to the low percentages if silt and clay in the sand placed on the beaches.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.5.7 Effects on State-Designated Areas Important for Managed Species

Primary Nursery Areas are designated by the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission and are defined by North Carolina as tidal saltwaters that provide essential habitat for the early development of commercially important fish and shellfish (15A NCAC 03B .1405). Many fish species undergo initial post-larval development in the areas. PNAs would not

be expected to be affected by implementing the proposed project since no PNAs are located in the project area. The Molasses, Coward, and Smokehouse Creeks PNAs are located west of the Battery Island Channel, but at least 3,500 feet away from its nearest point, and no widening is proposed on the west side of the channel.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.5.8 Effects on Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV)

There are no SAVs in the project area.

7.5.9 Ebb Tide Delta (Cape Fear River Inlet)

The Battery Island Turn is not located in the ebb tide delta.

The Entrance Channel, Reach 1 would be moved westward toward naturally deep water for a one time reduction in dredging cost, but the channel would be basically located near where it has been from over 150 years. No placement will occur on the ebb tide delta. Therefore the Entrance Channel, Reach 1 will not adversely impact the ebb tide delta.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to proposed action except the Entrance Channel, Reach 1 would not be moved western toward naturally deep water.

7.5.10 Effects on Cape Fear Sandy Shoals

The sandy shoals off Cape Fear begin about 4 miles southeast of the Cape Fear River Inlet. No effects on these shoals are anticipated.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.5.11 Effects on Big Rock and Ten Fathom Ledge

Big Rock and the Ten Fathom Ledge are north of Cape Fear, North Carolina. As such, they would not be expected to be affected by implementing the proposed project.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.5.12 Impact Summary for Essential Fish Habitat

The proposed and No Action alternatives would not be expected to cause any significant adverse impacts to EFH or HAPC for those species managed by the SAFMC and MAFMC.

No Action: Impacts similar to proposed action.

Table 7.1. Categories of EFH and HAPC and potential impacts

Essential Fish Habitat	In/near project vicinity	Project impact area	Dredge plant operation	Sediment placement activities
Estuarine areas				
Estuarine Emergent Wetlands	no	no	no	no
Estuarine Scrub/Shrub Mangroves	no	no	no	no
Submerged Aquatic Vegetation	no	no	no	no
Oyster Reefs & Shell Banks	no	no	no	no
Intertidal Flats	no	no	no	no
Palustrine Emergent & Forested Wetlands	no	no	no	no
Aquatic Beds	no	no	no	no
Estuarine Water Column	yes	yes	within acceptable limits	within acceptable limits
Seagrass	no	no	no	no
Creeks	no	no	no	no
Mud Bottom	no	no	no	no
Marine areas				
Live/Hard Bottoms	no	no	no	no
Coral and Coral Reefs	no	no	no	no
Artificial/Man-made Reefs	yes	no	no	no
Sargassum	yes	no	no	no
Water Column	yes	yes	within acceptable limits	within acceptable limits
Geographically Defined HAPC				
Area-wide				
Council-designated Artificial Reef Special Mgnt Zones	no	no	no	no
Hermatypic (reef-forming) Coral Habitat and Reefs	no	no	no	no
Hard Bottoms	yes	no	no	no
Hoyt Hills	no	no	no	no
Sargassum Habitat	yes	no	no	no
State-designated Areas of Importance of Managed Species (PNAs)	no	no	no	no
Submerged Aquatic Vegetation	no	no	no	no
Ebb Tide Delta (Cape Fear River)	yes	yes	yes	no
North Carolina				
Big Rock	no	no	no	no
Bogue Sound	no	no	no	no
Pamlico Sound at Hatteras/Ocracoke islands	no	no	no	no
Cape Fear sandy shoals	distant offshore	no	no	no
Cape Hatteras sandy shoals	no	no	no	no
Cape Lookout sandy shoals	no	no	no	no
New River	no	no	no	no
The Ten Fathom Ledge	no	no	no	no
The Point	no	no	no	no

7.6 Terrestrial Resources

Terrestrial areas that are in the vicinity of the proposed actions include the Battery Island and ocean beaches of Bald Head Island and Oak Island/Caswell Beach. However, no terrestrial resources, including vegetation, will be impacted by the proposed project except for the placement of dredging material on the beaches of Bald Head Island and Oak Island/Caswell Beach.

Entrance Channel, Reach 1: Project construction would not be expected to have an adverse effect on wildlife found along the beach or in the fore-dune areas. However, short-term transient effects could occur to mammalian species and birds using the fore-dune habitat, but those species are mobile and would be expected to move to other, undisturbed areas of habitat during beach placement.

The placement of sediment along the study area would be expected to directly affect ghost crabs through burial (USACE 2004, Lindquist and Manning 2001, Peterson et al. 2000, Reilly and Bellis 1983). Because ghost crabs are vulnerable to changes in sand compaction, short-term effects could occur from changes in sediment compaction and grain size. According to Hackney et al. (1996), management strategies recommended to enhance recovery after beach placement are: (1) timing activities so that they occur before recruitment and, (2) providing beach sediment that favors prey species and burrow construction. Ghost crabs are present on the project beach year-round (Hackney et al. 1996); therefore, direct effects from burial could occur during the proposed construction time frame. However, the peak larval recruitment time frame would be avoided, and because nourished sediment will be compatible with the native beach, it is expected that ghost crab populations would recover within one year post-construction (USACE 2004, Lindquist and Manning 2001, Peterson et al. 2000, Reilly and Bellis 1983). Because ghost crabs recover from short-term effects and because recommended management strategies to avoid long-term effects would be followed, no significant long-term impacts to the ghost crab population would be expected.

Although the project area is developed and sustains recreational use, migratory shorebirds could still use the project area for foraging and roosting habitat. Beach placement activities could temporarily affect the roosting and intertidal macro-fauna foraging habitat, however, recovery often occurs within one year if placement material is compatible with native sediments. A 2-year study in Brunswick County, North Carolina (USACE 2004) indicated that beach placement had no measurable impact to shorebird use. Although temporary impacts to the shorebird prey base could occur in the affected areas, the entire length of the Bald Head Island and Oak Island/Caswell Beaches are impacted during each placement event which would allow for availability of adjacent unaffected foraging habitat. Because (1) areas of diminished prey base are temporary and isolated, (2) recovery occurs within one year if material is compatible, and (3) adjacent unaffected foraging and roosting habitat would be available throughout the project, it would not be expected that foraging and roosting habitat would be significantly affected by implementing the proposed action.

Although it is possible that shorebird nesting could occur in the project area during the spring and summer months (April 1–August 31), most of the bird species have been displaced by development pressures and recreational use along the beach; thus, traditional nesting areas on the project beach have been reduced.

Many of the bird species have retreated to the relatively undisturbed dredged material placement islands that border the navigation channels in the area. Nonetheless, it is possible that shorebird species would still attempt to nest in the project area. Typically, local interest groups regularly visually inspect the beaches and rope off all identified nesting areas with signage to discourage intrusion by the public. These areas are coordinated with North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC). To protect bird nesting, the NCWRC also discourages beach work between April 1 and August 31. Beach placement would

usually be conducted from December 1 through March 31, but an extension into April may be required in rare cases. Prior to conducting work outside of the aforementioned windows, USACE will coordinate with the appropriate resource agencies, including the NCWRC. Additionally, protective measures would be implemented during the bird nesting period, as contractors will be required to conduct visual surveys in the construction area each morning before commencement of work to confirm that no nests are present.

On the basis of the following considerations, the proposed construction activities would not be expected to significantly affect breeding and nesting shorebirds or colonial waterbirds in the project area: (1) contractors would adhere to the April 1 to August 31 bird-nesting window except in rare cases, and (2) project construction timing and planning would allow for rapid recovery of intertidal foraging habitat in the project area.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.7 Wetlands and Flood Plains

Battery Island Turn and Entrance Channel, Reach 1: There are no wetlands in the project dredging footprint or disposal areas and beach placement operations would not be expected to adversely affect floodplains.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.8 Endangered and Threatened Species

7.8.1 Federal

In accordance with Section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended, the USACE initiated informal consultation with both the USFWS and NMFS for the proposed project.

A summary of effect determinations for all listed species identified in the project area relative to both the beach placement and in-water related activities for the project are provided in Table 7.2. All commitments to reduce impacts to listed species are provided below.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.8.2 Summary of Effects Determinations

Sea Turtles—Loggerhead, Hawksbill, Kemp's Ridley, Green, and Leatherback

Entrance Channel, Reach 1: All five species are known to occur within oceanic waters adjacent to the project area; however, only the loggerhead, green, and leatherback sea turtles are known to nest within the limits of the project beach placement area. Therefore, species specific impacts may occur from the beach placement. Also, a hopper dredge may be used, and hopper dredges are known to take turtles. Considering the proposed dredging window (December 1-March 31) to avoid the presence of sea turtles and to avoid the sea turtle nesting season to the maximum extent practicable, the proposed project may affect but is not likely to adversely affect loggerhead, green and leatherback sea turtles. Re-establishment of a berm with a gradual slope can enhance nesting success of sea turtles by expanding the available nesting habitat beyond erosion and inundation prone areas.

Battery Island Turn: Hopper dredges may be used for the project, and these dredges are known to take sea turtles. However, considering the proposed dredging window (December 1-March 31) to avoid the presence of sea turtles, the proposed project may affect but is not likely to adversely affect loggerhead, green and leatherback sea turtles.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

Table 7.2. Threatened and endangered species effects determination for beach placement and dredging activities associated with the proposed project.

Listed Species w/in the Project Area		Effect Determination	
		Beach Placement Activities (USFWS)	In-Water Dredging Activities (NMFS)
Sea Turtles	*Leatherback*	MANLAA	MANLAA
	Loggerhead	MANLAA	MANLAA
	Green	MANLAA	MANLAA
	Kemp's Ridley	NE	NE
	Hawksbill	NE	NE
Large Whales	*Blue, Finback, Sei, and Sperm*	NE	NE
	NARW	NE	MANLAA
	Humpback	NE	MANLAA
West Indian Manatee		NE	MANLAA
Atlantic Sturgeon		NE	MANLAA
Shortnose Sturgeon		NE	MANLAA
Piping Plover and Red Knot		MANLAA	NE
Red-cockaded Woodpecker and Wood Stork		NE	NE
Seabeach Amaranth		MANLAA	NE
Cooley's Meadowrue and Rough-Leaved Loosestrife		NE	NE

Notes: No Effect (NE = green), May Affect Not Likely to Adversely Affect (MANLAA = orange)

Large Whales—Blue Whale, Finback Whale, Humpback Whale, North Atlantic Right Whale, Sei Whale, and Sperm Whale

Battery Island Turn and Entrance Channel, Reach 1: Of the six species of whales being considered, only the North Atlantic Right whale and humpback whale would normally be expected to occur within the project area during the project construction period. Therefore, the proposed project will have no effect on the blue whale, finback whale, sei whale, and sperm whale. Conditions to reduce the potential for accidental collision (i.e. contractor pre-project briefings, large whale observers, slow down and course alteration procedures, etc.) will be implemented as a component of this project. Based on the implementation of these

conditions, dredging activities associated with the proposed project may affect but are not likely to adversely affect the North Atlantic Right whale or its associated critical habitat and the humpback whale species.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

West Indian Manatee

Battery Island Turn and Entrance Channel, Reach 1: Since the habitat and food supply of the manatee will not be significantly impacted, overall occurrence of manatees in the project vicinity is infrequent, all dredging will occur in cold weather, and precautionary measures for avoiding impacts to manatees, as established by USFWS guidelines attached in Appendix J, will be implemented for transiting vessels associated with the project, the proposed action may affect but is not likely to adversely affect the manatee.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

Shortnose and Atlantic Sturgeon

Hopper dredges are known to take sturgeon, but the areas to be dredged are not likely to be feeding areas for sturgeon due to high velocity currents, generally sandy surface substrate, and frequent ship traffic. Therefore, it has been determined that the actions of the proposed project may affect but are not likely to adversely affect the shortnose and Atlantic sturgeon.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

Piping Plover and Red Knot

There is no designated critical habitat for the wintering piping plover in the project area. The long-term effects of the project may restore some roosting, sheltering and foraging habitat areas through the addition of beach fill; however, short-term impacts to foraging, sheltering, or roosting habitat may occur during project construction. Therefore, it has been determined that the project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the piping plover.

The Red Knot was listed as threatened in December 2014. Potential impacts should be similar to the Piping Plover.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

Red-cockaded Woodpecker and Wood stork

No feeding or nesting habitat exists in the project area for these species. Therefore, it has been determined that the project will have no effect on these species.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

Seabeach Amaranth

Beach placement will restore much of the existing habitat lost to erosion and is expected to provide long-term benefits to seabeach amaranth; however, construction and deep burial of seeds on a portion of the beaches during project construction may slow germination and population recovery over the short-term. Therefore, the project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect seabeach amaranth.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

Cooley's Meadowrue and Rough-Leaved Loosestrife

No habitat exists in the project area for these species. For this reason, it has been determined that the project will have no effect on these species.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.8.3 Federal Consultation Summary

On January 8, 2014, the USACE initiated informal consultation under Section 7 of the ESA with both NMFS and USFWS. Informal consultation is appropriate for the proposed action since none of the species have a "May Affect Not Likely to Adversely Affect" determination. By email dated May 20, 2016 USFWS confirmed that Section 7 requirements are covered by the 2000 Wilmington Harbor Sand Management Plan Biological Opinion, and consultation for the proposed dredging is not required. By email dated January 28, 2016, NMFS concurred that the proposed action is covered by the SARBO, and no additional consultation is required.

7.8.4 State Coordination Summary

As indicated in Section 2.8, the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program, by letter dated August 9, 2012 (NCNHP 2012), listed the state rare plant and animal species and natural communities within the vicinity of the project area. That list included the federal species indicated above. See discussion above for manatee, sturgeon and alligator.

Carolina Diamondback Terrapin

The Carolina diamondback terrapins generally inhabit tidal marshes and nest on sandy beaches in the estuary. None of these habits will be altered by the proposed project.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

Black-necked Stilt

The State Significantly Rare Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*) breeds sporadically in the vicinity of the Anchorage Basin, depending on the availability of some standing water in diked areas of Eagle Island. Eagle Island is over 20 miles upstream of the proposed project. The Lower Cape Fear River Bird Nesting Islands SNHA, Brunswick River/Cape Fear River Marshes SNHA, and Battery Island SNHA are in the lower Cape Fear River. However Battery Island is the only site adjacent to the project. The only issue there is the slight increase in ship wakes since the widened channel would be closer to the island. However as indicated in Section 7.1, the increase in wave height is considered negligible.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

Significant Natural Heritage Areas

Regarding the Brunswick River/Cape Fear River Marshes SNHA, no marshes will be dredged, filled or otherwise impacted by the proposed project.

Based on the above discussion, the actions proposed at the Battery Island Turn and Entrance Channel, Reach 1 should not adversely impact the state indicated natural communities or species.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.9 Cultural Resources

Entrance Channel, Reach 1: There are no known historic properties east of the proposed entrance channel realignment within the project area of potential effects (Area of Potential Effect (APE), Figure 7.2). One historic property, a mid- to late-nineteenth century shipwreck (Target 1-14), lies approximately 730 feet west of the current entrance channel prism (Figure 7.3). Realignment of the channel 115 feet to the west is proposed at this location placing the top of slope approximately 570 feet from Target -14.

The wreck lies outside of the project's APE; however, potential project effects were assessed due to the large no impact zone around Target 1-14. The proposed project action will occur outside the 500 foot no impact zone for Target 1-14 and no effects are expected for the proposed Entrance Channel, Reach 1 realignment.

Battery Island Turn: Three shipwrecks and one engine boiler, state site numbers 0038CFR, 0052CFR, 0081CFR and 0085CFR respectively, are within the APE for the proposed realignment at Battery Island (Figure 7.4). The barge wreck (0038CFR) south of Battery Island is approximately 730 feet from the current channel prism. The proposed realignment would move the channel prism 250 feet closer, placing the top of slope approximately 420 feet from the wreck. The remains of the Confederate ironclad North Carolina (0052CFR) lie approximately 715 feet from the current channel prism. The proposed realignment would move the current channel prism 30 feet to the east and place the top of slope approximately 625 feet from site 0052CFR. The Belfast (0081CFR) is located approximately 865 feet from the existing channel prism. The proposed channel realignment would move the current channel prism 350 feet towards Battery Island and place the top of slope of the approximately 460 feet from site 0081CFR.

There are no known historic properties on the western shore of Battery Island. The current channel lies within the Southport Historic District approximately 1,300 to 1,650 feet southwest of the Southport waterfront where three historic properties have southern boundaries terminating at the river's edge (Figure 7.4). The proposed realignment would move the channel 100 feet closer at one point in the outside turn before tapering to the current alignment 1,600 feet to the north (Figure 7.4). Modification of the current western channel slope would not be required due to the river depths within and adjacent to the current channel. No effects to the Southport waterfront are anticipated based on the distance of the current channel from the Southport waterfront, the slight movement of the channel to the northwest, and the speed of vessels within the Battery Island turn.

No direct effects from channel realignment are expected based on the above distances from the estimated top of slope and sites 31BW004, 31BW017, 31BW144, 0038CFR, 0052 CFR, 0081CFR, and 0085CFR. No indirect effects associated with ship induced waves anticipated due to the negligible increase in vessel wave height discussed in Section 7.1.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

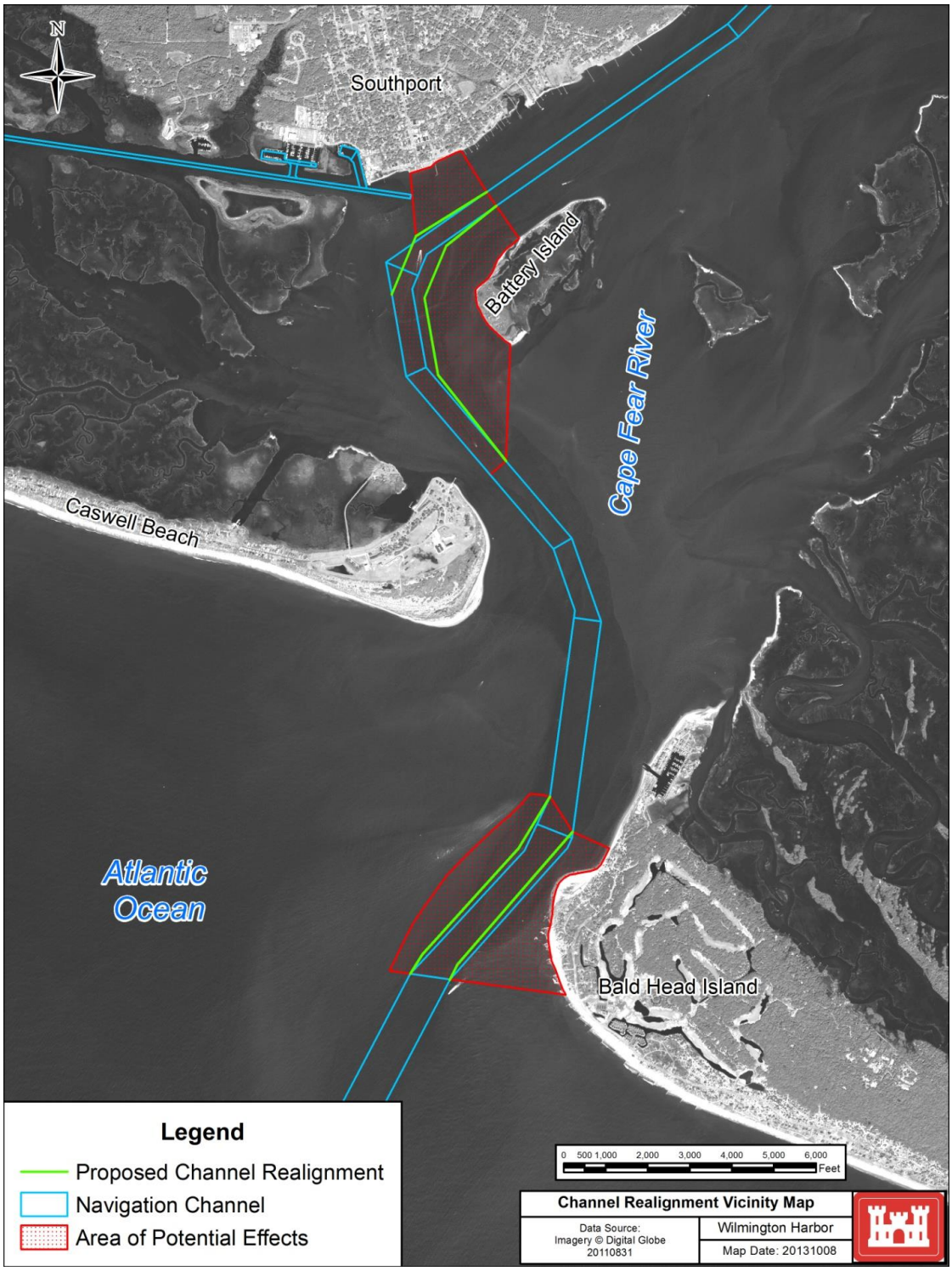


Figure 7.2. Area of Potential Effects

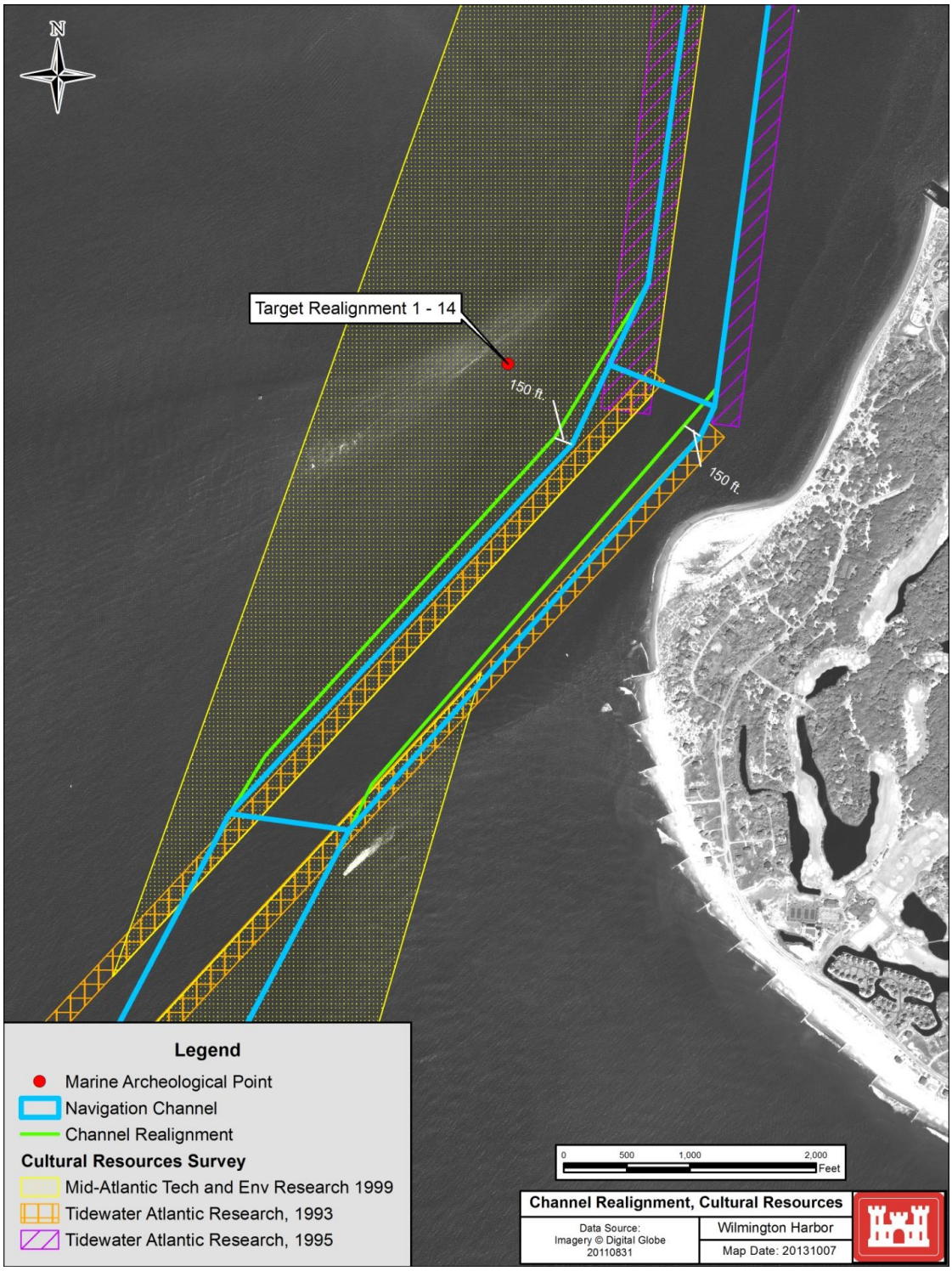


Figure 7.3. Bald Head Island Entrance Channel, Reach 1

Figure 7.4. Battery Island Turn

7.10 Aesthetic and Recreational Resources

Aesthetic resources will not be impacted with the proposed action because dredging and beach placement will occur basically with the same frequency and duration as under existing conditions. No recreational activities will be impacted compared to existing conditions. Dredges are often present in the river and do not block traffic and sand is periodically pumped on Oak Island/Caswell and Bald Head Island Beaches.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.11 Recreational and Commercial Fishing

No recreational or commercial fishing activities will be impacted compared to existing conditions (No Action). Dredges are often present in the river and do not work in prime fishing locations. Pumping sand on the beaches may temporarily disrupt surf fishing in the immediate area of placement, but that is a temporary disruption and is no different than the existing periodic pumping of sand onto Oak Island/Caswell and Bald Head Island Beaches.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.12 Coastal Barrier Resources System

The "John H. Chafee Coastal Barrier Resources System (CBRS)" will not be adversely affected by the proposed project. Portions of the existing Wilmington Harbor navigation channel border or lie within NC-07P as does a portion of the proposed channel realignment near Battery Island. However, the maintenance or construction of improvements of existing federal navigation channels including the placement of dredged materials related to such maintenance or construction is exempted from CBRS restrictions http://www.fws.gov/CBRA/Consultations/Limitations-and-Exceptions.html.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.13 Socio-Economic Resources

The Recommended Plan for the Wilmington Harbor Navigation Improvements Project is not anticipated to cause any negative socioeconomic impacts to the study area. This includes no long-term adverse impacts within local or regional employment, no adverse impacts to wages, and no detrimental impacts to local and regional tax bases.

As it is projected that the project will increase the efficiency of Port operations by reducing delay time by making it easier for larger vessels to navigate to staging areas, it is assumed that the potential for improved local and regional economies is increased by enhancements to the shipping channel. Any reduction in delays could translate to potentially more jobs and job stability as efficiency increases at the Port and at companies that are serviced by the Port. The addition of jobs in the region will theoretically improve local tax bases, leading to improved infrastructure and municipal services for the local and regional residents. Aside from direct employment impacts to the area's gross regional product, it is assumed that any expansion of direct economic inputs will result in a localized multiplier effect, potentially benefitting local businesses. This is quantified in the definition of RED in Table 5.5.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.14 Hazardous and Toxic Wastes

There are no Hazardous and Toxic Waste sites in the area of effect for the Recommended Plan, the Battery Island Turn and the Entrance Channel, Reach 1. It would not be expected that any hazardous and toxic waste sites would be encountered during construction. No production of HTRW would result from the construction of this project.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.15 Other Significant Resources (P.L. 91-611, Section 122)

7.15.1 Air, Noise, and Water Pollution

Temporary increases in exhaust emissions from construction equipment are expected during the construction of the project, however, the pollution produced would be similar to that produced by other large pieces of machinery during existing maintenance and should be readily dispersed.

Water quality impacts are discussed in Section 7.2 including the Section 404(b)(1) (P.L. 95-217) analysis in Appendix G. Noise in the outside environment associated with beach construction activities would be expected to minimally exceed normal ambient noise in the project area, however, construction noise would be attenuated by background sounds from wind and surf. In-water noise would be expected in association with the dredging activities for this project but no different than existing maintenance activities.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.15.2 Man-made and Natural Resources, Aesthetic Values, Community Cohesion, and the Availability of Public Facilities and Services

Impacts to aesthetic values are discussed in Section 7.10. Impacts to natural resources are discussed previously throughout Section 7 including cultural resources discussed in Section 7.9. Beach placement would benefit roads, other infrastructure and residences especially in the eroding areas. Implementing the Recommended Plan would be expected to have beneficial effects on community cohesion and would reduce potential damage from storm events.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.15.3 Adverse Employment Effects and Tax and Property Value Losses

Tax and property values will not be negatively affected by this project since private property will not be adversely impacted. Also, employment will not be adversely impacted.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.15.4 Injurious Displacement of People, Businesses, and Farms

Dredging and material placement activities will not negatively affect any people, farms, or businesses in the project area. In-water dredging activities may temporarily displace people utilizing the surf zone for fishing, recreation, or other purposes; however, this displacement will be short-term and will not have lasting effects.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.15.5 Disruption of Desirable Community and Regional Growth

This project will not alter community cohesiveness or devalue communities in or near the project area. Similarly, regional growth will not be negatively affected by this project.

No Action: Impacts would be similar to the impacts of the proposed action.

7.16 Summary of Cumulative Effects

The Entrance Channel, Reach 1 has been maintained in its approximate current alignment for over 100 years and is being shifted westward a maximum of 150 feet to follow naturally deep water to reduce dredging costs.

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) defines cumulative impact as:

The impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency (federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time (40 CFR 1508.7). This detailed analysis is included in Appendix I and follows the 11-step process outlined by the CEQ in their 1997 publication *Considering Cumulative Effects Under the National Environmental Policy Act.*

Proposed Project. The assessment of cumulative effects focused on effects of the following: 1) widening of the Battery Island Turn; 2) continued placement of beach quality sediment on the Brunswick County beaches; 3) continued maintenance dredging within the existing federal navigation channels; and 4) construction of a terminal groin by Bald Head Island.

1. Widening of Battery Island Turn. For the Battery Island turn widening, about 35.9 acres of the river bottom will be dredged, but the area to be dredged is essentially all over 25 feet deep and it is not designated a primary nursery area or other special designation. All but about 0.13 acres of this area is at or below the existing 25 ft contour at MLLW. The 0.13 acre area is on the side slopes and the shallowest depth in this area is about 14 feet MLLW. About 6.25 acres of the existing turn will be eliminated from future maintenance dredging.

No additional widening or deepening of the Wilmington Harbor Ship Channel by the USACE is planned or anticipated in the foreseeable future.

2. Continued placement of beach quality sediment on the Brunswick County Beaches. The periodic pumping of sand on the Oak Island/Caswell and Bald Head Island Beaches has occurred for over 10 years and placement of maintenance material on the beaches is anticipated to continue under the Wilmington Harbor Sand Management Plan (Appendix F). During the deepening of Wilmington Harbor in the early 2000's, beach quality sand was placed on the Brunswick County beaches from Bald Head Island through Holden Beach. Also, periodically since 2001, there has been a USACE project for placement of beach quality sand on Ocean Isle Beach every 2-3 years.

Relatively small portions of North Carolina beaches (about 6%) are presently affected by the beach placement or placement of sand from maintenance activities. With the proposed project, the impact area would not increase since placement has occurred before on Oak Island/Caswell and Bald Head Island Beaches. On a statewide scale, the existing and approved placement sites are well distributed in northern central and southern parts of the

state with undeveloped protected beaches (i.e., National/Federal and State Parks and Estuarine Reserves) in between. It is unlikely that cumulative impacts will occur due to the implementation of this project. The analysis suggests that the potential impact area from the proposed and existing actions is small relative to the area of available similar habitat on a vicinity and statewide basis. These areas are expected to recover food resources, which should continue to be available. It is expected that the risk is low that direct and cumulative impacts of the proposed action and other existing similar activities, would reach a threshold with high potential for population level impacts on important commercial fish stocks and birds.

3. Effects of continued maintenance dredging. Benthic organisms within the defined federal navigation channels and widened Battery Island Turn would be lost. The benthic organisms found in the areas adjacent to the federal navigation channels would not be impacted and would provide benthic populations for recolonization. Deepening and maintenance dredging in Wilmington Harbor began in 1822 and periodic deepening occurred until the current project depth was achieved in the early 2000's. The proposed project will not involve any channel deepening and only widening in the Battery Island Turn. No additional deepening or widening is planned or anticipated for the foreseeable future. Maintenance dredging of the navigation channel and widened Battery Island Turn would be accomplished by pipeline, hopper and/or bucket and barge and would not cause any long term impacts in the project area.

4. Construction of a terminal groin by Bald Head Island.

The Village of Bald Head Island received a Department of the Army permit and other clearances to construct a terminal structure (groin) at the western end of South Beach in close proximity to the Wilmington Harbor Navigation Project channel. The terminal groin is intended to serve to reduce sediment loss from adjacent Bald Head Island beach but due to its short length and limited bypassing design features, will not significantly reduce dredge maintenance cost for the operation of the Wilmington Harbor navigation channel. The terminal groin may serve to stabilize the shoreline alignment along the western end of South Beach providing increased protection to property and infrastructure along this section of the beach. Construction of the terminal groin was completed in 2015.

No Action Alternative

No adverse cumulative impacts are anticipated as a result of implementation of the No Action alternative. Maintenance dredging of the Entrance Channel, Reach 1 along its existing alignment will continue with periodic, funding-dependent placement of dredged material on the beaches of Oak Island/Caswell and Bald Head Island.

Maintenance dredging of Battery Island Turn along its existing alignment will continue with periodic, funding-dependent placement of dredged material in the ODMDS.

8.0 RISK & UNCERTAINTY CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 Economic Analysis Uncertainties

The Principles & Guidelines and subsequent ER-1105-2-100 recognize the inherent variability to water resources planning. Navigation projects and container studies in particular are fraught with uncertainty about future conditions. A sensitivity analysis is a useful technique that addresses uncertainty by systematically adjusting parameters in a model to determine the effects of such changes.

Risk and uncertainty for the Wilmington Harbor Navigation Improvements Project are captured in various ways. The HarborSym model used in this study captures uncertainty in the vessel class attributes such as speeds and hourly cost for the vessels calling Wilmington Harbor. Turning times at the Anchorage Basin, vessel docking times, and commodity transfer rates are the categories that capture some uncertainty in the HarborSym model for the set-up of the Port structure.

A sensitivity analysis was conducted for the commodity forecast for two scenarios: a no commodity growth scenario and half growth in commodities moving on the Far East trade route.

The first scenario assumed half growth for the commodities traded on the Far East. Commodity growth rates are subject to variability and are influenced by many hard to predict factors. For this reason, an adjustment was made to the Far East trade route that assumed half of the growth than the original analysis. The change was made for the Far East trade route only because the majority of the trade and benefits were derived from this region. The assumption for the fleet remained that by 2018 one of the Far East services would transition to a post-Panamax vessel. The remainder of the tonnage/TEUs would be carried on a Panamax containership. Once the commodity tonnage and TEUs were determined, the vessel fleet was determined for years 2018, 2024 and 2031 to model in HarborSym for the economic benefits. Total transportation cost-savings benefits for the scenario are $20,637,000. When annualized and annual reduction in tug assist benefits included, the benefits are $701,000. The total investment cost is $14,424000 when annualized, and with average annual O&M included, the annual costs are $585000. The net benefits are $236000 and the benefit to cost ratio is 1.4 to 1.

Another sensitivity analysis performed assumed no growth in the commodity forecast past 2018. It was assumed that growth for all trade regions occurred until the base year of 2018 and held constant afterwards. Hence, the number of calls per vessel type remained constant through the period of analysis, 2018 through 2067. Total transportation cost savings benefits are $22,705,000. When annualized and added to the annual reduction in tug assist cost, the average annual benefits are $903,000. The total investment cost remains at $14,424,000, when annualized and average annual O&M included the annual costs are $585,000. The net benefits are $318,000 and the benefit to cost ratio is 1.54 to 1.

8.2 Engineering

There is a risk associated with not performing a ship simulation analysis for the proposed improvements. A ship simulation would have provided a greater degree of confidence that

vessels would be able to navigate the modified entrance channel. But since the design vessel is currently navigating the channel, there is a low level of risk associated with this uncertainty. Additionally, the pilots do not envision any problems with the proposed Entrance Channel, Reach 1 realignment. There is also low risk associated with not performing a ship simulation analysis for the Battery Island Turn (channel) improvements: since the existing turn is made less severe and the pilots are in agreement with the proposed channel geometry changes.

Construction risk for the proposed study is considered low since subsurface information has been gathered, this type of construction has been performed before, and traditional dredging methods are expected to be used in performing the construction. Potential for risks associated with O&M are also low. A slight temporary increase in shoaling volume is expected until the widened channel banks stabilize and this increase is accounted for in the cost estimate. (also addressed in the Engineering Appendix (B)).

8.3 Cost Risk Analysis

A Cost Risk Analysis is a systematic and comprehensive method to evaluate uncertainty and risks that may affect the estimated project costs. Risks were characterized by the magnitude of possible uncertainties and the probability of occurrence for each item or event. In compliance with Engineer Regulation 1110-2-1302 Civil Works Cost Engineering, dated September 15, 2008, the USACE performed an abbreviated risk analysis to establish project contingencies by identifying and measuring the cost and schedule impact of project uncertainties with respect to the estimated project cost. The Cost Risk Analysis for this project was conducted by the USACE' Cost Engineering Center of Expertise at Walla Walla District. Details of the analysis can be found in the Cost Appendix (F).

8.4 Environmental Impact and Mitigation Uncertainties

Consideration was given to uncertainties that exist in the ability to predict the impacts from the proposed improvements to the Wilmington Harbor. Uncertainties occur when knowledge is incomplete. In the case of this project, there are uncertainties in such things as sediment quality, beach placement, and exposure of cultural resources. The major risks associated with the environmental analysis are (1) that the predicted level of impacts understates the actual impacts that will occur, and (2) that such understatement would alter a decision-maker's conclusions on whether the project should be constructed.

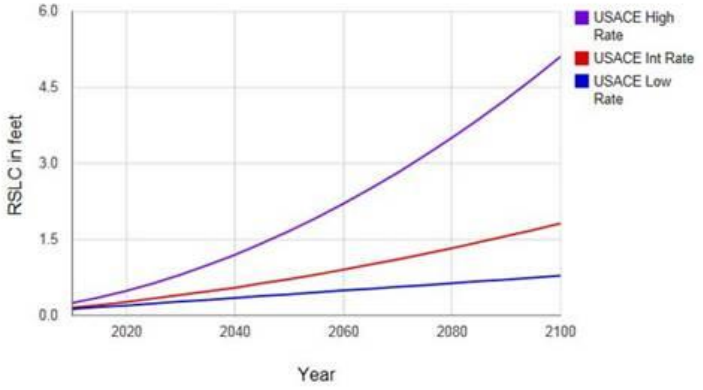
8.5 Risks and Uncertainty with Sea Level Change

USACE guidance (EC-1165-2-212) requires consideration of three possible future rates of sea-level change (SLC). SLC predictions for the USACE low, intermediate, and high rates are shown in Figure 8.1. The sea-level rise predictions over a 50 year period range from 0.4 feet to 2.0 feet. SLC is not expected to adversely affect the proposed changes to the existing navigation channel since changes due to SLC to the coastal processes affecting the navigation channel would be the same with or without the project under all scenarios. Further detail on the sea level analysis conducted is contained in Appendix M.

USACE SLC Curves - Gauge NC, Southport: 74 yrs
USACE Curves computed using criteria in EC 1165-2-212

USACE Curves computed using criteria in USACE EC 1165-2-212

Gauge NC, Southport: 74 yrs All values are in feet			
Year	USACE Low	USACE Int	USACE High
2010	0.13	0.16	0.25
2015	0.17	0.21	0.36
2020	0.20	0.27	0.49
2025	0.24	0.34	0.64
2030	0.28	0.41	0.81
2035	0.31	0.48	1.00
2040	0.35	0.55	1.20
2045	0.39	0.64	1.43
2050	0.42	0.72	1.67
2055	0.46	0.81	1.93
2060	0.50	0.91	2.21
2065	0.53	1.01	2.51
2070	0.57	1.11	2.82
2075	0.60	1.22	3.16
2080	0.64	1.33	3.51
2085	0.68	1.45	3.88
2090	0.71	1.57	4.27
2095	0.75	1.69	4.68
2100	0.79	1.82	5.11



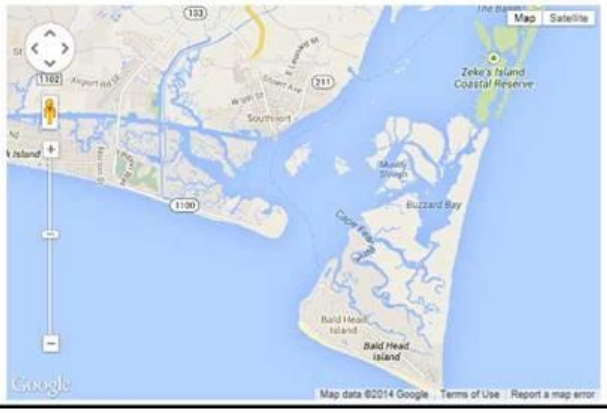


Figure 8.1. Sea-Level Change at the mouth of the Cape Fear River.

9.0 COMPLIANCE WITH ENVIRONMENTAL REQUIREMENTS*

The following paragraphs summarize the relationship of the proposed action to the most pertinent Federal, State, and local requirements. Table 9.1 at the end of this section lists the compliance status of all Federal laws and policies that were considered for the proposed Wilmington Harbor Improvements Project.

9.1 Water Quality

9.1.1 Section 401 of the Clean Water Act of 1977

A Section 401 Water Quality Certificate under the Clean Water Act of 1977 (P.L. 95-217), as amended, is required for the proposed beach placement. This project will use the North Carolina Division of Water Quality's March 19, 2012, Water Quality Certification No. 3908: General Certification for Projects Eligible for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Regional General Permit 198000048 Involving Disposal of Dredged Material on Ocean Beaches within North Carolina.

9.1.2 Section 404 of the Clean Water Act of 1977

Pursuant to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, the effects associated with the discharge of fill material into waters of the United States are discussed in the Section 404(b)(1) (P.L. 95-217) evaluation in Appendix G.

9.2 Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act

The proposed Wilmington Harbor improvements at Battery Island would involve ocean placement of dredged material. The presence of rock and/or cemented sands and high percentage of fines precludes its placement on the beaches. The dredged material would be evaluated pursuant to Section 103 of the MPRSA. Concurrence by EPA is required prior to transportation for the purpose of placement. The Wilmington Harbor ODMDS Site Management and Monitoring Plan (SMMP) directs dredged material placement in that EPA designated site.

9.3 Essential Fish Habitat

Potential project effects on EFH species and their habitats have been evaluated and are addressed in Section 7.5 of this document. It has been determined that the proposed action would not have a significant adverse effect on such resources. Informal EFH consultation has been ongoing since study commencement. Through coordination of the EA document with the NMFS, consultation will be officially initiated and concurrence with the USACE findings will be requested. Compliance obligations related to EFH provisions of the 1996 congressional amendments to the MSFCMA (P.L. 94-265) would be fulfilled before initiation of the proposed action.

9.4 Fish and Wildlife Resources

The Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 661, et seq), requires that the USACE coordinate and obtain comments from the USFWS, the NMFS, where applicable, and appropriate State fish and wildlife agencies, including the NCDMF and the NCWRC. A Final Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act Report (Appendix J) has been provided by the USFWS under the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act.

9.5 Endangered and Threatened Species

A Biological Assessment evaluating the potential effects of the proposed action on Federally listed threatened and endangered (T&E) species has been prepared and will be coordinated with the USFWS (jurisdiction over the Florida manatee, nesting sea turtles, piping plovers, red knots, and seabeach amaranth) and NMFS (jurisdiction over other protected marine and aquatic species which can occur in the project vicinity) pursuant to Section 7 of the ESA of 1973 (P.L. 93-205), as amended. All compliance obligations under Section 7 will be satisfied. Environmental commitments to protect listed species, related to the construction and maintenance of the proposed project, are listed in Appendix K. The list of commitments should be considered preliminary at this stage and may be modified pending new information acquired through the public and agency review process.

9.6 Cultural Resources

A summary of the proposed Wilmington Harbor Improvements was submitted to the SHPO pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The SHPO responded that all of the proposed improvements fall within areas previously surveyed for submerged cultural resources. The SHPO concurred with the finding that the work should have no impact on unknown submerged resources. As noted in the numerous survey reports, there are several known historic shipwrecks within the APE that must be considered. Extreme care will be taken during all dredging operations for channel realignment and all personnel will be made aware of restrictive buffer zones around these shipwreck sites.

9.7 Executive Order 11988 (Flood Plain Management)

Executive Order 11988 requires Federal agencies to avoid, to the extent possible, the long and short-term adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of flood plains and to avoid direct and indirect support of floodplain development wherever there is a practicable alternative. In accomplishing this objective, "each agency shall provide leadership and shall take action to reduce the risk of flood loss, to minimize the impact of floods on human safety, health, and welfare, and to restore and preserve the natural and beneficial values served by flood plains in carrying out its responsibilities.

The project is responsive to the EO 11988 objective of “avoidance, to the extent possible, of long- and short-term adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of the base flood plain and the avoidance of direct and indirect support of development in the base flood plain wherever there is a practicable alternative” because it would not induce development in the floodplain, would reduce the hazard and risk associated with floods thereby minimizing the impacts of floods on human safety, health, and welfare, and would restore and preserve the natural and beneficial values of the base floodplain.

9.8 Executive Order 11990 (Protection of Wetlands)

Executive Order 11990 directs all Federal agencies to issue or amend existing procedures to ensure consideration of wetlands protection in decision making and to ensure the evaluation of the potential effects of any new construction proposed in a wetland. The proposed action would not require filling any wetlands and would not be expected to produce significant changes in hydrology or salinity affecting wetlands. The proposed action is in compliance with Executive Order 11990.

9.9 Migratory Bird Treaty Act

Executive Order 13186 directs departments and agencies to take certain actions to further implement the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The proposed project would not result in a take as defined under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and therefore, is also in compliance with Executive Order 13186.

9.10 North Carolina Coastal Management Program

The proposed action would be conducted in the designated coastal zone of North Carolina. Pursuant to the Federal Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended (P.L. 92-583), Federal activities are required to be consistent, to the maximum extent practicable, with the federally-approved coastal management program of the State in which their activities will occur. The components of the proposed action have been evaluated and determined to be consistent with the North Carolina Coastal Management Program and local land use plans. Consistency Concurrence was obtained by letter dated September 7, 2016.

9.11 Coastal Barrier Resources Act

The Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA) of 1982 (P.L. 97-348) prohibits expenditure of Federal funds for activities within the designated limits of the Coastal Barrier Resources System unless specifically exempted by Section 6 of the Act. As stated in that section, Federal expenditures are allowable in association with maintenance of existing channel improvements, including placement of dredged material related to such improvements.

The "John H. Chafee Coastal Barrier Resources System" will not be adversely affected by the proposed project. Portions of the existing Wilmington Harbor navigation channel border or lie within NC-07P as does a portion of the proposed channel realignment near Battery Island. However, the maintenance or construction of improvements of existing Federal navigation channels, including the placement of dredge materials related to such maintenance or construction, is exempted from CBRS restrictions.

9.12 Estuary Protection Act

The Estuary (Estuarine) Protection Act provides a means to protect, conserve, and restore estuaries in a manner that maintains balance between the need for natural resource protection and conservation and the need to develop estuarine areas to promote national growth. The act authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to work with the states and other Federal agencies in undertaking studies and inventories of estuaries of the United States. The proposed project would be expected to have minimal effect on the estuarine environment, as discussed in Section 7 of this report; therefore the project would be in compliance with the Estuary Protection Act.

9.13 Prime and Unique Agriculture Land

According to the Soil Surveys for Brunswick County, North Carolina, the soils on the beach that could be affected by the proposed project are not designated by the Natural Resource Conservation Service as prime or unique agriculture lands. No impacts to prime and unique agriculture lands would be expected to occur.

9.14 Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice)

The proposed action would impact Bald Head Island and Oak Island beaches in a positive manner. The proposed action would not cause disproportionately high and adverse impacts on minority populations or low income populations. No impacts to either minority/low-income populations or low income communities are anticipated as a result of the Proposed Action; therefore, the action would comply with EO 12898.

Table 9.1. The relationship of the proposed action to Federal laws and policies.

Title of public law	U.S. Code	Compliance status
Abandoned Shipwreck Act of 1987	43 U.S.C. 2101	Full Compliance
Anadromous Fish Conservation Act of 1965, As Amended	16 U.S.C. 757 a et seq.	Full Compliance
Antiquities Act of 1906, As Amended	16 U.S.C. 431	Full Compliance
Archeological and Historic Preservation Act of 1974, As Amended	16 U.S.C. 469	Full Compliance
Archeological Resources Protection Act of 1979, As Amended	16 U.S.C. 470	Full Compliance
Clean Air Act of 1972, As Amended	42 U.S.C. 7401 et seq.	Full Compliance
Clean Water Act of 1972, As Amended	33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.	Full Compliance
Coastal Barrier Resources Act of 1982	16 U.S.C. 3501-3510	Full Compliance
Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, As Amended	16 U.S.C. 1451 et seq.	Full Compliance
Endangered Species Act of 1973	16 U.S.C. 1531	Full Compliance
Estuary Program Act of 1968	16 U.S.C. 1221 et seq.	Full Compliance
Federal Water Project Recreation Act of 1965, As Amended	16 U.S.C. 4601	Full Compliance
Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act of 1958, As Amended	16 U.S.C. 661	Full Compliance
Flood Control Act of 1944, As Amended, Section 4	16 U.S.C. 460b	Full Compliance
Historic and Archeological Data Preservation	16 U.S.C. 469	Full Compliance
Historic Sites Act of 1935	16 U.S.C. 461	Full Compliance
Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act	16 U.S.C. 1801	Full Compliance
Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act of 1972	33 U.S.C. 1401	Full Compliance
Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1928, As Amended	16 U.S.C. 715	Full Compliance
Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, As Amended	16 U.S.C. 703	Full Compliance
National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, As Amended	42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.	Full Compliance
National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, As Amended	16 U.S.C. 470	Full Compliance
National Historic Preservation Act Amendments of 1980	16 U.S.C. 469a	Full Compliance
Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act	25 U.S.C. 3001	Full Compliance
Noise Control Act of 1972, As Amended	42 U.S.C. 4901 et seq.	Full Compliance
River and Harbor Act of 1899, Sections 9, 10, 13	33 U.S.C. 401-413	Full Compliance
River and Harbor and Flood Control Act of 1970, Sections 122, 209 and 216	33 U.S.C. 426 et seq.	Full Compliance
Submerged Lands Act of 1953	43 U.S.C. 1301 et seq.	Full Compliance
Protection and Enhancement of Environmental Quality	11514/11991	Full Compliance
Protection and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment	11593	Full Compliance
Floodplain Management	11988	Full Compliance
Protection of Wetlands	11990	Full Compliance
Federal Compliance with Pollution Control Standards	12088	Full Compliance
Federal Compliance with Right-To-Know Laws and Pollution Prevention	12856	Full Compliance
Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice and Minority and Low-Income Populations	12898	Full Compliance
Protection Of Children from Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks	13045	Full Compliance
Invasive Species	13112	Full Compliance
Marine Protected Areas	13158	Full Compliance
Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds	13186	Full Compliance

Note: Items identified as being in *Full Compliance* will be in full compliance status after the NEPA process is complete.

10.0 SUMMARY OF AGENCY AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

10.1 Scoping

A scoping letter describing the proposed Wilmington Harbor Navigation Improvement Project and requesting public and agency participation was circulated July 5, 2012 and a scoping meeting was held on August 7, 2012 in Wilmington, NC. Agency and public responses were received from: the US Department of Interior – US Fish and Wildlife Service, US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration-National Marine Fisheries Service, State of North Carolina (Natural Heritage Program, Division of Coastal Management and Department of Cultural Resources), the Village of Bald Head Island, Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton LLP representing Towns of Caswell Beach and Oak Island, and the North Carolina Baptist Assembly.

10.2 Cooperating Agencies

Pursuant to Section 1501.6 of the CEQ NEPA regulations (40 C.F.R. 1501.6), eligible Federal, State, and local agencies, along with stakeholders interested in or affected by the Federal agency decision on this project can participate as a cooperating agency. No agency indicated interest in become a cooperating agency.

10.3 Fish and Wildlife Coordination

A Final Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act Report was provided by the USFWS dated August 6, 2014, and is included in Appendix J. USACE has considered the recommendations of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act Report. Responses can also be found in Appendix J.

10.4 Coordination of this Document

10.4.1 Public Review

The proposed action and the environmental impacts of the proposed action are addressed in the Wilmington Harbor Navigation Improvements Draft Integrated Feasibility Report and Environmental Assessment (EA), dated April 2014. The Draft Integrated Feasibility Report and EA was made available to an extensive list of local, State and Federal regulatory agencies and the public on June 2014 for a 30-day review and comment period. The Feasibility Report and EA have also been placed on the Wilmington District Website.

10.4.2 Review Plan

The Review Plan (Appendix L) was originally developed in June of 2012 with the Deep Draft Navigation Planning Center of Expertise and the USACE Cost Engineering Center of Expertise in Walla Walla District and is currently being updated to reflect recent study activities and the Independent External Peer Review (IEPR) waiver (March 2014). Reviews include District Quality Control reviews and Agency Technical Reviews of the Draft and Final Reports. A policy review and a legal review will be conducted on the Final Report. Additional reviews include cost engineering review and certification, and legal review and certification.

10.4.3 IEPR

On the basis of the USACE Peer-review Guidance (EC1165-2-214), this study does not

meet the triggers for an IEPR because (1) an EIS is not included, (2) the Recommended Plan is not likely to have significant economic, environmental, or social affects to the nation, (3) the study is not likely to have significant interagency interest, (4) the study does not involve significant threat to human life, (5) the estimated total project cost is less than $45 million in total, (6) the study is not highly controversial, and (7) the study is not based on novel methods, does not present complex challenges for interpretation, does not contain precedent-setting methods or models, or present conclusions that are likely to change prevailing practices. Therefore, a request for exclusion from IEPR was submitted to USACE headquarters and the South Atlantic Division. The waiver was requested February 3, 2014. The waiver was approved in April 2014.

11.0 PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

11.1 Transition to O&M Program

As the Wilmington Harbor Improvements study is included under the authority for the Wilmington Harbor 96 Act project, upon report approval by South Atlantic Division, the recommended plan contained here within will be implemented under the O&M authority of the Wilmington Harbor 96 Act project. Therefore, there will not be a PED or Construction phase, but upon SAD's approval of the feasibility report, the Wilmington Harbor Improvements project will transition directly into the O&M program. O&M funds will therefore be utilized to prepare plans and specifications. These provide detailed drawings and instructions for constructing the project.

The USACE SAW Construction Branch will be responsible for construction management during the project construction phase of the project. Construction management includes contract administration and quality assurance. The primary function of quality assurance is to make sure the project is constructed in accordance with the contract requirements and the end product complies with the quality established by the contract.

11.2 Initial Implementation

The Entrance Channel, Reach 1 improvements will likely be accomplished by a large ocean certified cutter head suction dredge and a hopper dredge. This improvement work would be combined with a routine maintenance dredging contract such as typically done for the Wilmington Harbor Outer Ocean Bar and the Wilmington Harbor Inner Ocean Bar. From historic dredging cycles, the dredged material within the existing entrance channel footprint is expected to be suitable for beach placement and can either be pumped to the Bald Head Island beach or to the Oak Island/Caswell beach. Pumping onto the nearby beaches is the current method of placement of dredged material from the existing entrance channel. The dredged material in the western portion of the realigned channel and outside of the existing channel footprint is not suitable for beach placement and will be transported to and disposed of in the Wilmington Ocean Dredged Material Disposal Site (ODMDS). Dredging of the western portion of the realigned channel is most likely to be by hopper dredge but could also be performed with a cutterhead suction dredge.

The Battery Island Channel turn improvements could be accomplished by cutterhead suction dredge, clamshell dredge, or hopper dredge. If a cutterhead suction dredge or clamshell dredge is used, the dredged material would be placed in a dump scow and towed by tug to the placement area. Dredged material from the Battery Island Channel turn improvements will be transported to and disposed of in the Wilmington Ocean Dredged Material Disposal Site (ODMDS).

11.3 Maintenance

Entrance Channel, Reach 1

Maintenance dredging is expected to be accomplished by a large cutterhead suction dredge, but could also be performed by hopper dredge. It is anticipated that shoaling within the realigned Entrance Channel in the period after initial construction will be suitable for the beach. The dredged material will be pumped to and disposed of on the nearby beaches of

Bald Head Island or Oak Island/Caswell. The current SMP (Appendix H) for the entrance channel anticipates dredging of Baldhead Shoal Channel Reach 1 every other year; however, the actual dredging has been more intermittent due to Federal O&M funding shortfalls. For this report it will be assumed that maintenance dredging would occur every other year. Realignment of the entrance channel is not expected to reduce the rate at which the channel shoals. The average annual shoaling rate is anticipated to remain at approximately 250,000 cubic yards. Shoaling and channel conditions will be monitored by performing project condition surveys of the channel a minimum of twice a year.

Battery Island Channel Turn

Maintenance dredging is expected to be accomplished by hopper dredge or a clamshell dredge. Dredged material from the Battery Island Channel turn will be transported to and disposed of in the Wilmington Harbor Ocean Dredged Material Disposal Site (ODMDS). However, during maintenance operations if the sediment to be dredged is determined to be beach quality, it may be pumped to the Bald Head Island beach or to the Oak Island/Caswell beach or placed in a zone within the ODMDS set aside for sandy material.

11.4 Project Schedule

This feasibility report can be approved at the SAD level and will not require a civil works review board or HQ/ASA approval for implementation. Therefore, assuming that SAD approval can be obtained by September 2016, bio-assays and plans and specifications could be completed by September 2017. The contract could be awarded and begin construction December 2017 pending availability of funds in the O&M program. It is anticipated the construction would require 30 days of mobilization, 60 days of dredging, and 15 days of de-mobilization.

Table 11.1. Project Implementation Schedule

Activity	Completion date
Plans and Specifications Complete	September 2017
Real Estate Acquisition Complete	No additional real estate is needed for this project
Construction Start	December 2017

11.5 Cost Sharing

The reconnaissance phase for the Wilmington Harbor Navigation Improvement Projects was 100% federally funded. The Feasibility phase was cost shared at 50% Federal and 50% non-Federal. The implementation as part of the O&M program will be completed at a 100% Federal Cost.

11.6 Project Cooperation Agreement

As the implementation of the recommended plan will be accomplished in the O&M program, an amendment to the Project Cooperation Agreement between the State of North Carolina and USACE will not be required prior to the award of the construction contract.

12.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is the determination of the Wilmington District that the Entrance Channel, Reach 1 component of the Recommended Plan can be implemented as part of the regularly-scheduled O&M cycle for the Wilmington Harbor '96 Act, NC Project authority. The proposed movement of the entrance channel to follow deep water in order to reduce maintenance costs, which will be realized in an immediate savings in the approximate amount of $2,364,790 is appropriate under the authority provided in ER 1165-2-119, Paragraph 9, which states in relevant part: "Where not otherwise precluded by project authorization, the location of a completed channel may be altered during the course of the periodic maintenance program if the maintenance can thereby be more economically accomplished and related aids to navigation are readily adjustable to suit the restored channel dimensions at the shifted location."

It is the recommendation of the Wilmington District that the Battery Island Turn component of the Recommended Plan be approved for implementation under the existing Wilmington Harbor '96 Act, NC Project. The proposed modification to the Battery Island Turn is authorized under ER 1165-2-119, Paragraph 9, which states in relevant part: "The River and Harbor Act of 1915 provides (Section 5) an authority to increase channel dimensions, beyond those specified in project authorization documents, at entrances, bends, sidings and turning places as necessary to allow the free movement of vessels." Section 5 of the River and Harbor Act of 1915 (codified at 33 USC 562) was amended in 1992 to permit this authority to be exercised "after the project becomes operational". The current ER 1165-2-119 precedes this amendment; therefore it indicates that the authority has no general application to completed projects. The ER has not been revised to take this amendment into account.

Implementation of both components under the existing Wilmington Harbor 96 Act, NC Project authority will not exceed the 902 limit of the Project.

Date: _____

_____

Kevin P. Landers, Sr.

Colonel, U.S. Army
District Commander

13.0 LETTERS OF SUPPORT AND FINANCIAL CAPABILITY

(TO BE INSERTED LATER)

14.0 POINT OF CONTACT

Any comments or questions regarding this Feasibility Report and EA should be addressed to Wilmington Harbor Navigation Improvements Project Manager, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 69 Darlington Avenue, Wilmington, NC 28403, telephone (910) 251-4483.

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