

Intent To Prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule Study (LORSS) of the Central and Southern Florida Project for Flood Control and Other Purposes.

AGENCY: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, DOD.

ACTION: Notice of intent.

SUMMARY: The Jacksonville District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, intends to prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) upon completion of the feasibility study and prior to implementation of an alternative regulation schedule for Lake Okeechobee, Florida.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Questions about the proposed action and draft EIS can be answered by: Mark Ziminske, U.S. Army Engineer District, P.O. Box 4970, Jacksonville, Florida 32232-0019; Telephone 904-232-1786.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Lake Okeechobee is a large, shallow, subtropical lake, of 1,732 km² surface area located in Central-South Florida. Lake Okeechobee's drainage basin covers almost 12,000 km² much of which is agricultural land, dairy and beef cattle to the north, and the 280,000 ha Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA; mostly sugar, rice, and winter vegetable crops) to the south. Major surface water inflows to the lake are from the Kissimmee River, Harney Pond and Indian River basins, Fisheating Creek, and Taylor Creek/Nubbin Slough. Major outflows include evapotranspiration, the Caloosahatchee River to the west, the St. Lucie Canal to the east, and several canals draining into the EAA and south to the Water Conservation Areas and ultimately to the Everglades and Florida Bay.

The scope of this study is to consider a range of regulation schedule alternatives for Lake Okeechobee in order to optimize environmental benefits at minimal or no impact to the competing project purposes, primarily flood control and water supply. The alternatives to be considered include: The existing Run 25-3, Run 25-3 with Natural System Model (NSM) demands, Run 22 AZE, Run 22 AZE with NSM demands, and the Lower East Coast Regional Water Supply Plan (LECRWSP) Alternative 1.

The current regulation schedule (Run 25-3) maintains lake surface water elevations ranging from 15.65 feet to 16.75 feet and releases water to the estuaries at relatively high lake stages, in a more graduated fashion. Run 22 AZE is basically Run 25-3 with the

addition of a large Zone E, which allows for low level discharges at low stages of 13.75 feet to 15.60 feet. The NSM demands put an additional water supply demand on Lake Okeechobee by establishing targets for delivering water to restore the Everglades to their pre-drainage condition. Runs 25-3 and 22 AZE with NSM demands would tend to lower the water surface in the lake without changing the regulated water levels. The LECRWSP Alternative 1 schedule varies from 14.0 feet to 17.0 feet and differs significantly from the other schedules described above.

The scoping process as outlined by the Council on Environmental Quality will be utilized to involve Federal, State, and local agencies and other interested persons and organizations. A scoping letter will be sent to interested Federal, State, and local agencies requesting their comments and concerns regarding issues they feel should be addressed in the EIS. Interested persons and organizations wishing to participate in the scoping process should contact the Corps of Engineers at the address above. Significant issues anticipated include concern for: water supply, continued flood control, agricultural impacts, protection of the lake's environmental resources and its downstream estuaries, water quality, and fish and wildlife habitat enhancement. Public scoping meetings will be conducted in the future, the exact location, dates, and times will be announced in public notices and local newspapers.

It is estimated that the DEIS will be available to the public in July 1997.

Gregory D. Showalter,

Army Federal Register Liaison Officer.

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Department of the Army Corps of Engineers

Intent To Prepare a Draft Supplement I to the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Wilmington Harbor Channel Widening, New Hanover and Brunswick Counties, NC

AGENCY: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, DoD.

ACTION: Notice of intent.

SUMMARY: Wilmington Harbor is an approximately 31-mile-long Federal navigation project located along the Cape Fear and Northeast Cape Fear Rivers in southeastern North Carolina. Local interests, represented by the North Carolina State Ports Authority, the North Carolina Division of Water

Resources, and the Cape Fear River Pilots Association, have requested that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers study the following improvements for Wilmington Harbor: (1) construction of a 6.2-mile-long passing lane at a central location between the North Carolina State Port and the mouth of the Cape Fear River; and (2) widening of five turns. This recommended plan may require the blasting of nondredgeable rock. Possible adverse impacts could occur to endangered species, primary nursery areas, and anadromous fish migrations. This Draft Supplement I to the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) will address the effects of blasting on the estuarine environment and develop a post-blast monitoring plan. Additionally, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is looking at alternative disposal areas for dredged material.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Questions about the Draft Supplement I to the FEIS can be answered by: Mr. Hugh Heine, Environmental Resources Section, at the U.S. Army Engineer District, Wilmington, Post Office Box 1890, Wilmington, North Carolina 28402-1890; telephone: (910) 251-4070.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This study was conducted under authority of a resolution adopted 8 September 1988 by the Committee on Public Works and Transportation of the United States House of Representatives. The authorizing resolution directs studies of the entire Wilmington Harbor-Northeast Cape Fear River navigation system. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was filed with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) on August 13, 1993, and was circulated for a 45-day public review period. Comments received on the DEIS were addressed in the FEIS. The FEIS was filed with USEPA in April 1994. The Record of Decision was signed on August 25, 1994.

1. As indicated in both the DEIS and FEIS, the principal adverse environmental impacts associated with the proposed action stem primarily from the blasting required to remove any nondredgeable rock. Possible adverse impacts could occur to endangered species, primary nursery areas, and anadromous fish migrations. Since the publication of the DEIS and FEIS, it is estimated from core borings, the most recent geophysical surveys, and historical data that the top of rock is below minus (-) 41 feet mean lower low water (mllw) for Turn 1, the 6.2-mile-long passing lane (which includes Turn 5), and Turn 6. However, this same data indicates that the top of rock is located above - 41 feet mllw for Turns