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**US Army Corps
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Public Notice

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Philadelphia District

Internet Homepage <http://www.nap.usace.army.mil>

In Reply Refer to: Environmental Resources Branch

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT NJIWW CHANNEL MAINTENANCE AND BENEFICIAL USE OF DREDGED MATERIAL IN THE VICINITY OF STONE HARBOR, CAPE MAY COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

Pursuant to Section 102 of the National Environmental Policy Act, Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT the Philadelphia District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, has completed a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for NJIWW Channel Maintenance and Beneficial Use of Dredged Material in the Vicinity of Stone Harbor, Cape May County, New Jersey. The EA evaluates existing environmental, cultural, and socio-economic conditions at the proposed project sites, which are located on or adjacent to Ring Island in Middle Township, NJ, and the effects of the project on existing resources in the immediate and surrounding areas. The project sites have been developed with the assistance of the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife (NJDFW) and the Wetlands Institute. The restoration sites are on land owned by the NJDFW.

The New Jersey Intracoastal Waterway (NJIWW) project was adopted in 1939 (HD 76-133, 1st session). This sea-level inland waterway, extends along the New Jersey Coast from the Atlantic Ocean at Manasquan Inlet, about 26 miles south of Sandy Hook, New Jersey to Delaware Bay about three miles north of Cape May Point. The waterway extends through the inlet and up the Manasquan River about two miles and thence through the Point Pleasant Canal about two miles to the head of Barnegat Bay. It then passes through a series of bays, lagoons and thoroughfares along the New Jersey coast to Cape May Harbor and thence across Cape May County to Delaware Bay (Cape May Canal). This project is normally maintained to a depth of six feet Mean Low Water (MLW), except in the southern portion in the vicinity of the Cape May

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Canal where it is maintained to a depth of up to 12 feet MLW. The total project length is 117 miles.

The NJIWW provides a safe, reliable, and operational navigation channel for the East Coast's largest and 5th most valuable commercial fishing fleet in the U.S. (Cape May/Wildwood) and eight U.S. Coast Guard Stations including the Cape May training base. The USCG requires a reliable channel to fulfill their Homeland Security requirements and conduct search and rescue operations. Other commercial users include head-boats and tour-boats that operate over various portions of the waterway. The Delaware River and Bay Authority operates a ferry service between Cape May, New Jersey and Lewes, Delaware and the ferries dock in the Cape May Canal. Almost 1.5 million passengers are dependent on maintenance dredging to keep the four vessels operating. The South Jersey economy is heavily dependent on recreational and commercial fishing and tourism, and these industries rely on the maintained channels of the NJIWW.

Stone Harbor is a borough in Cape May County, New Jersey. It occupies the southern portion of Seven Mile Island together with its northern neighbor Avalon. The portion of the NJIWW channel in the vicinity of Stone Harbor that requires maintenance dredging is between channel markers 419 and 421. The channel is critically shoaled to depths of approximately 3 to 5 feet MLW creating a significant hazard to navigation and public safety. Approximately 12,000 cubic yards of sand are required to be dredged from this portion of the NJIWW channel to restore the channel to the authorized depth of 6 feet MLW plus 1 foot of overdepth dredging. The dredged material will be used beneficially and placement sites have been developed with the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife (NJDFW) and the Wetlands Institute for creation of a system of bird nesting islands on land owned by the NJDFW.

The current intent is to create a system of sites (1 to 2 acres each) that provide shorebird nesting habitat and expands on the successful habitat created on Ring Island Site 1 (Figure 1). Target species include the State endangered black skimmer (*Rynchops niger*) and least tern (*Sternula antillarum*). These species nest on open sandy beaches, inlets, sandbars, offshore islands, and dredged material disposal sites that are sparsely vegetated and contain shell fragments. Important attributes of suitable sites include the lack of vegetation and sufficient elevation to prevent nests from being flooded during extreme high tides and storm events. These attributes may change at a given site from year to year. As such, periodic placement of additional material may be necessary to

maintain habitat suitability. Having a system of sites insures that there will be suitable nesting habitat each year even if some sites require placement of additional material for maintenance. Other species of concern that would benefit from these open sandy sites include the American oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus*) and northern diamondback terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin terrapin*). These species also nest on sandy bay beaches. All of these species have suffered from various factors including overharvesting, habitat loss from coastal development, human disturbance from recreational activity and elevated predator levels.

Ring Island (Figure 1) is a saltmarsh complex located in Middle Township New Jersey, immediately adjacent to the NJIWW across from the borough of Stone Harbor. Ring Island is owned and managed by the NJDFW. Five alternative sites were identified and considered within the Ring Island complex. Sites were identified based on past disturbance or habitat degradation. For work in 2018 (approximately a 2 month construction period), Sites 1, 2 and 3 will receive sand dredged from the NJIWW. Sites 4 and 5 may be constructed in the future.

The design template for these sites is to place sandy dredged material on 1.0 to 2.0-acre parcels to an elevation of 6.0 feet NAVD 88. The final target elevation for nesting habitat is 5.5 feet NAVD 88. Some subsidence occurs after initial placement due to consolidation and compaction. The entire filled sites will not reach the target 5.5 feet. It is anticipated that a portion of the sites will be lower and establish high marsh habitat, which is an enhancement over existing conditions. The construction technique, which has been proven at Ring Island Site 1, is to initially pump sand on to a site to create a stable base and build up sand that can be subsequently used for creation of a berm around a portion of the site. Sand would be initially contained by the use of hay bales, coir logs and potential use of temporary geotextiles. Once sufficient sand has been placed on the site, a sand berm would be constructed for containment and a portion of the area would be filled to an elevation of 6.0 feet NAVD 88. After placement, the site can be contoured as necessary to achieve the target elevation of 5.5 feet NAVD 88. Additional material may be placed in subsequent years to maintain and optimize habitat quality. Vegetation would be controlled as needed on the sites to keep an open area for nesting. Sites will be monitored by the Wetlands Institute, a non-profit group located in Stone Harbor.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, a draft Environmental Assessment has been developed for this project and is being circulated to the appropriate State and Federal agencies; Local, State, and Federal officials; and other public interests.

Impacts to Water Quality have been evaluated in accordance with the Section 404(b)(1) guidelines of the Clean Water Act, and are not adverse. In accordance with Section 401 of the Clean Water Act, Water Quality Certification is being requested from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

In accordance with Section 307 (c) of the Coastal Zone Management Act, an activity affecting land or water uses in a State's coastal zone must comply with the State's Coastal Zone Management Program. A certification of compliance is being requested from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

It has been determined that the proposed work would not affect listed species or their critical habitat pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, as amended. Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service is on-going and will be completed to insure compliance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act.

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, as amended by the Sustainable Fisheries Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-267), requires all Federal agencies to consult with the National Marine Fisheries Service on all actions, or proposed actions, permitted, funded, or undertaken by the agency, that may adversely affect Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). A preliminary assessment of the effects of the proposed action on listed species and their life stages within this area indicates the project would not adversely affect EFH.

Review of the National Register of Historic Places indicates that no registered properties, or properties listed as eligible for inclusion, would be impacted.

All practicable means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental effects have been incorporated into the plan.

The public and all agencies are invited to comment on this proposal. The EA can be downloaded from our District website:

<http://www.nap.usace.army.mil/Missions/CivilWorks/PublicNoticesReports.aspx>.

If you have trouble accessing this information, please contact us for a hard copy. A 15-day comment period is provided (3 – 17 October 2018). If you have any further questions regarding this project or the EA, please contact Mr. Jerry Pasquale at Jerry.J.Pasquale@usace.army.mil.

Any person may request, in writing, to the District Engineer, within the comment period specified in this notice that a public hearing be held to consider this proposal. Requests for a public hearing shall state, in detail, the reasons for holding a public hearing.

All comments on the work described in this public notice and/or in the report titled: "*Environmental Assessment, NJIWW Channel Maintenance and Beneficial Use of Dredged Material in the Vicinity of Stone Harbor, Cape May County, New Jersey*" should be directed to Mr. Peter R. Blum, ATTN: Environmental Resources Branch, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Wanamaker Building, 100 Penn Square East, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19107-3390 by October 17, 2018.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. Blum for".

Peter R. Blum, P.E.
Chief, Planning Division
Philadelphia District
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

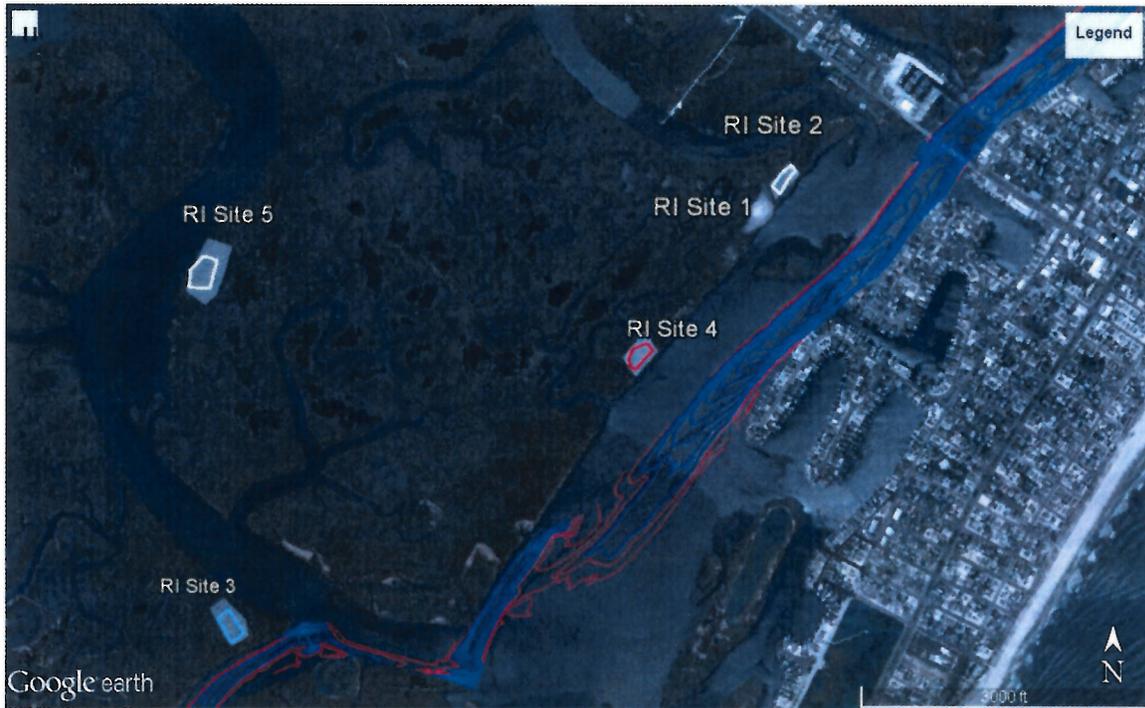


Figure 1. Ring Island Site Locations including habitat constructed in 2014 and 2018 (Site 1). Colored polygons are approximately 1 acre sites.