

Lower Wicomico River Maintenance Dredging Project

Follow-Up Question/Answer Guide

Q: What impact will this project have on boat/barge traffic near Dames Quarter Boat Ramp?

A: There will be minimal impact to boats and barges. The Dames Quarter Boat Ramp will not close as a result of this project. The portions of the 18 in. pipeline that will be carrying the sediment underwater from the dredge boat to the Dames Quarter Boat Ramp site will be flagged with buoys and have flashers marking its location. This pipeline will also be located outside of the main channel.

Q: How will oyster farms be impacted?

A: Lease owners with oyster farms have already been notified of the placement of the pipeline. The oyster beds are well marked and we will stay clear of them. In addition, one of the environmental factors limiting the window of time this project work can be completed is the Oyster season and so the project managers are aware of the Oyster farms and their importance.

Q: What effects will this project have on Hunting season?

A: This project aims to have very minimal effects. The hunting season dates are well known and materials will mostly be removed from the Deal Island WMA Boat Ramp lot once the season begins.

Q: What impacts will there be to Riley Roberts Rd and the boat ramp?

A: Trucks and the project team will need access to these roads throughout the duration of the project. Trucks will be used to carry some materials to the placement site but most equipment will be brought by barge. Currently the straw bales are being placed around the site's perimeter and once that work is complete construction on the tidal ditch plugs will begin. From now until the end of the tidal ditch construction there may be limited access to the Deal Island WMA Boat Ramp parking lot. The parking lot will have reduced availability from Monday to 12p on Friday. The Boat Ramp will remain open on weekends. Once the containment work is complete there will be no impacts to the boat ramp and minor equipment will remain in the parking lot. The contractor on this project will repair and restore the roads to the condition they were prior to construction.

Q: How much of the dredge material will be used and what does it consist of?

A: The sand and silt collected from the Lower Wicomico River from Shark Fin Shoal to Whitehaven will be carried, filtered and pumped through a pipeline beginning from the Dames Quarter Boat Ramp, under Route 363 near Messick Rd., along Riley Roberts Rd. and ending at the placement site located near the Deal Island WMA Boat Ramp. It is estimated that there will be ~140,000 cubic yards of dredge material collected and spread out over the 2 sites.

Q: What is the plan for any excess dredge material?

A: The placement acreage was designed for an excess of dredged material and bulking of the material as well. USACE would be able to modify the scope of the dredging, if needed, once the dredging occurs to reduce the quantity of dredged sediment if it appears to be an issue.

Q: What chemical contaminants can be found in the Wicomico River Dredge material? Is there a way to filter these out?

A: The sediment was sampled and tested in 2010 and fell within acceptable ranges. In February 2021, sediment samples were collected at the previously used upland placement site for the lower portion of the Wicomico River. These sediment samples also showed contamination levels within acceptable ranges and suitable to plants and similar species of vegetation to be planted at the Deal Island WMA. Similar material is anticipated to be removed from the federal channel for this cycle of maintenance dredging. While these cannot be filtered out they have not shown to be in high levels that would restrict the habitat growth intended. Follow up monitoring of the vegetation through multiple methods will also follow up on this concern.

Q: Why can't the barges carry the sediment around Deal Island and not pipe it across the wetlands and under Rt 363

A: Ideally this would be an option but the cost to transport the material from the Wicomico River to the placement sites was too high.

Q: What happens if the pipeline breaks or leaks? How fast can it be fixed?

A: The pipeline will pump approximately 80% water and 20% dredge material to be able to move from the beginning to the end of the pipeline. Due to the length of the pipeline there are multiple pumps needed to push the material from the start to the end point. As a result, there are multiple junctions to measure pressure. If a burst were to happen the pressure would drop immediately and the project team would shut off the pumps and assess and repair the section that ruptured. In addition, the pipeline will be flushed daily with only water to make sure the pipeline is cleared out and working properly.

Q: Is this project an experiment or are there other examples of projects that have successfully used thin layer placement?

A: This project is not the first of its type. There are multiple sites along New Jersey that have completed thin layer placement projects. Around 6 years ago a thin layer placement project was completed in Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge. Also, a thin layer placement project was completed in 2016 in Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge and one of the scientists working on that project is assisting us with this one.

Q: What are the expected short-term effects to water quality?

A: Short-term effects mainly include slight turbidity at the dredge cutter head while dredging is ongoing. Material placed at the WMA is intended to remain behind the containment structures, so any short-term water quality effect near the placement site will also be low levels of short-term turbidity.

Q: What are the expected impacts on animals?

A: The main impact will be the loss of shallow fish habitat. Throughout the wetlands currently are multiple channels, guts and canals and these areas will be covered with the dredge material placement. Once the wetland begins to restore itself after construction it is expected that these spawning habitats will return.

Q: How will this project deal with phragmites and make sure phrag does not move in and take over?

A: Currently there are no concerns of phragmites near the placement sites. As the project progresses they will continuously check to make sure phragmites is not found. If phragmites is found the project team will use safe herbicides to remove any invasive phragmites.

Q: What will be done to make sure the project is a success and does not contaminate local waterways?

A: The plan for this project is to restore approximately 75 acres of wetlands. In order to do this the wetland needs to be contained using ~34,000 linear feet of straw bales and ~ 20 tidal ditch plugs to prevent the material from escaping. This project will also require hand-planting of close to one million plants. Once the project is complete there will be 5 years of post-construction monitoring. This monitoring will include multiple items. There will be plant growth and diversity monitoring to make sure the plants are growing appropriately. There is expected to be a burst of growth in the first year due to the amount of nutrients in the dredge material, followed by a die off of many plants. Once this die-off is finished the plant growth will rebound. In addition to the plant monitoring there will be regular soil tests to keep track of carbon in the soil and bird nesting evaluations. Drones will be used to aerially keep track of the movement of the wetland. Naval Academy researchers will also be performing coastal wave analysis. These tracking measurements have already been started. Researchers will use the data collected after the project completion to compare with what was shown before the project began.

Lastly, there is a contingency plan so if there is an unexpected mass die-off of plants or a storm event the plants can be replaced. If soil levels need to be adjusted there are methods of doing that. If some plants are not receiving enough tidal influx of water we will cut out small portions of the marsh to make it easier for the inland areas of the wetland to get access.

Q: Is there a plan to replace straw bales if they deteriorate or wash away early? Also, what materials are used to tie the bales together?

A: Yes, the contract requires the straw bales to be in prime working, structurally sound condition prior to the placement of dredged material in the fall of 2023. Prior to the beginning of dredging the contractor will ensure that there is no damage to the existing straw bales and tidal ditch plug replacement structures. Any damaged or failing structures will be replaced prior to dredged sediment being placed.

Q: Does the project team provide regular/quarterly updates? What is the best way to get updates on the project as it progresses?

A: Project updates can be found on the USACE Wicomico Project Webpage, and the Deal Island WMA webpage. (Links below) I also believe MDDNR, Somerset County and County Commissioners will be making updates on their webpages. and updating in the local papers.

<https://www.nab.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Wicomico-River-Maintenance-Dredging-Project/>

<https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/pages/publiclands/eastern/dealisland.aspx>

Q: We feel we do not get a lot of communication about this project, who can we contact?

A: A recording of the April 2021 Public Meeting can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4ORENhXn6Q>

In addition, questions can be submitted to the project manager, Danielle Szimanski,
Danielle.m.szimanski@usace.army.mil

The Army Corp's Corporate Communication Office number is 410-962-6809 and email address is CENAB-CC@usace.army.mil

Lastly the Deal Island Peninsula Partnership will take your questions and pass on to the project team.
dealislandpeninsulapartners@gmail.com

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