



US Army Corps
of Engineers.
Seattle District

Notice of Preparation

Planning Branch
P.O. Box 3755
Seattle, WA 98124-3755
ATTN: Rebecca Jahns (PM-PL)

Public Notice Date: August 20, 2007
Expiration Date: September 20, 2007
Reference: PL-07-07
Name: Skagit County Diking District 17 Levee
Rehabilitation

Interested parties are hereby notified that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Seattle District (Corps) plans to prepare, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, an environmental assessment (EA) for 6 proposed levee repairs on the Skagit River, near the City of Mount Vernon, Skagit County, Washington. In early November 2006, rainfall caused major flooding on the Skagit River, and resulted in a 15-year peak flooding event in Skagit County, Washington. During this event, several levee segments in Skagit County Diking District 17 (DD17) sustained damage from erosion or scour. The 6 damage sites total about 950 linear feet of levee, all on the waterward side.

AUTHORITY

The levees are non-federal, and the projects are active in the Public Law (PL) 84-99 Rehabilitation and Inspection Program.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Corps proposes to repair the damages to the pre-flood level of protection reshaping and armoring the riverward slopes over the damaged lengths. The riverward slope will be reshaped to the greatest extent possible, and a three foot blanket of class IV riprap will be placed for armor rock. The armor rock will catch at the river bottom, and no buried toe will be constructed. Material removed from the front slope will be placed back over the armor, down to the ordinary high water mark (OHW), allowing for hydroseeding or other approved planting. At each location of work, willow plantings will be installed to produce fast-growing, slim-stemmed vegetation at the OHW line to increase slope stability and provide fish cover and sustenance. Two methods of planting – willow lifts and stinger plantings – will be determined by site conditions. The location of the proposed work locations are shown on the attached map. All work is proposed to occur in the fall of 2007.

ANTICIPATED IMPACTS

Puget Sound Chinook salmon, Puget Sound steelhead, and coastal/Puget Sound bull trout, all listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), utilize the lower

Skagit River for migration, forage, and rearing habitat. The Corps' preliminary determination is that the proposed project **is likely to adversely affect** Puget Sound Chinook salmon and their critical habitat, Puget Sound steelhead, and coastal/Puget Sound bull trout and their critical habitat. In order to accomplish the most critical repairs prior to the next flood season, work would extend after the approved in-water work window for a majority of the proposed work. The two primary impacts to listed species are the timing of in-water work and the vegetation removal.

The timing of the repair work will coincide with the late summer peak of ESA-listed Chinook river entry in late August/September. These fish spawn just upstream from the project area. ESA-listed summer and winter steelhead juveniles will be migrating downstream through the project area. Summer steelhead adults enter the Skagit from July to October and will be migrating upstream through the reaches of construction work. This is a small population with limited habitat and is considered a fragile stock. Bull trout sub-adults are likely to be moving upstream through September, and adults will be outmigrating after spawning in late October and November. Pink salmon spawning begins as low as river mile 23, and river entry coincides with the construction schedule. Coho adults will begin migrating upstream in the Lower Skagit during the construction work period. Disturbance in the water and clearing on the shoreline are likely to cause delays to migration for any salmon species in the area.

There will be a temporary loss of aquatic habitat value due to removal of woody shrubs and bushes along the bank in the work areas. Impacts to vegetation would be minimized to the extent practicable. In some locations, woody riparian vegetation would be removed to provide access to the repair area. Other areas would require removal of grassy or invasive vegetation (i.e. blackberries, Japanese knotweed). Plantings of willows or other native shrubs would be incorporated into project construction with the goal of replacing lost riparian vegetation as soon as possible. Establishment of willows will likely take 3 to 7 years. Loss of riparian vegetation this year will impact 3-7 years of outmigrating juvenile salmon while plants grow to maturity.

The Corps will incorporate the following Conservation Measures into the project to the maximum extent practicable:

- Spread out work crews geographically to decrease intensity of localized disturbance;
- Construct at least 2 lifts on each site for willow plantings;
- Utilize the approved planting list for Western Washington Levees for upslope planting where levee design allows;
- Commitment to post-project plant watering until November rain begins; and

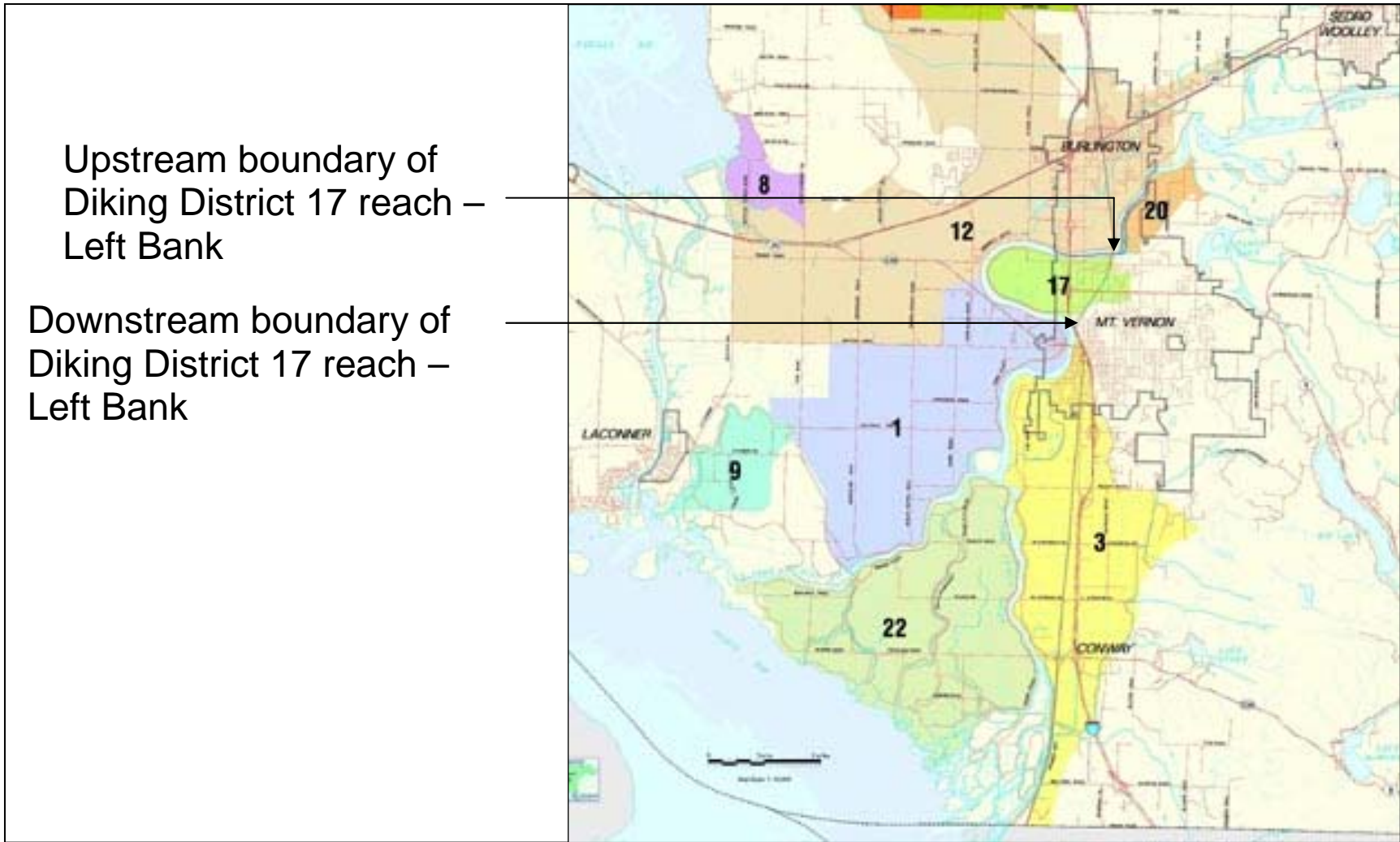
The Corps will also commit to fully funding and performing all Reasonable and Prudent Measures (RPMs) or Reasonable and Prudent Alternatives that are described if Biological Opinions are received from the Services following Section 7 Endangered Species Act consultation.

The Corps has made a preliminary determination that the environmental impacts of the proposal can be adequately evaluated under the National Environmental Policy Act through preparation of an environmental assessment (EA). Preparation of an EA addressing potential environmental impacts associated with the levee rehabilitation project is currently underway.

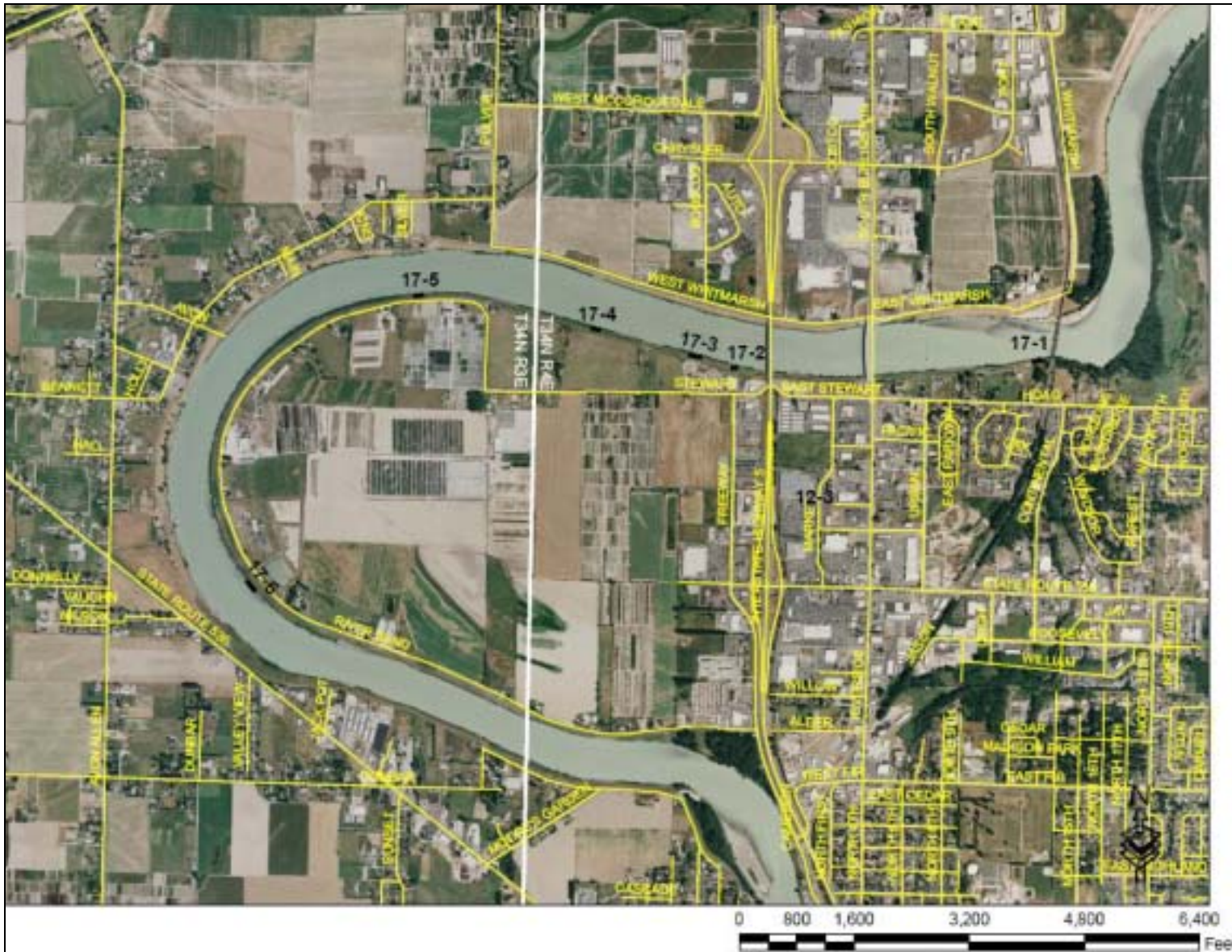
The Corps invites submission of factual comment on the environmental impact of the proposal. The Corps will consider all submissions received before the expiration date of this notice. The nature or scope of the proposal may be changed upon consideration of the comments received. The Corps will initiate an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and afford all the appropriate public participation opportunities attendant to an EIS, if significant effects on the quality of the human environment are identified and cannot be mitigated.

Submit comments to this office, Attn: Environmental Resources Section, no later than September 20, 2007 to ensure consideration. In addition to sending comments via mail, comments may be e-mailed to Rebecca.L.Jahns@usace.army.mil.

Requests for additional information should be directed to Rebecca Jahns, Project Manager, at 206-764-3451 or the above e-mail address.



Vicinity Map of Diking District 17, Skagit County, Washington



Diking District 17, Skagit County, Levee Repair Locations – 6 sites