

Technology Applications, ATTN: AMSRL-DP-T/Bldg. 459, Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD 21005-5425, telephone: (410) 278-5038.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** None.

**Luz D. Ortiz,**

*Army Federal Register Liaison Officer.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

### Department of the Army; Corps of Engineers

#### Intent To Prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Palm Beach Harbor Lake Worth Access Channel Expansion, Section 107 Small Navigation Project

**AGENCY:** Department of the Army, Army Corps of Engineers, DOD.

**ACTION:** Notice of intent.

**SUMMARY:** The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), Jacksonville District intends to prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Palm Beach Harbor Lake Worth Access Channel Expansion, Section 107 Small Navigation Project. The study is a cooperative effort between the Corps and the Florida Inland Navigation District (FIND), with the support of Palm Beach County (PBC) and the Port of Palm Beach Harbor (PBH).

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** James McAdams, 904-232-2117, Environmental Branch, Planning Division, P.O. Box 4970, Jacksonville, FL 32232-0019.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The DEIS for the PBH Lake Worth Access Channel Expansion, Section 107 Small Navigation Project was authorized by the Flood Control Act of 1968.

The purpose of the study is to consider modifying the Federal navigation project of PBH to provide navigation access for larger and deeper-draft vessels to interior berthing, testing, and repair facilities located adjacent to PBH in Lake Worth. Existing depths in the proposed Lake Worth main access channel area are presently limited to the 10-foot deep Federal IWW channel that runs north and south from the Port. The need for this deepening project comes from the recent growth in larger/deeper-draft vessels requiring deeper water depths to safely navigate the interior area.

The study involves an analysis of available information from sources within the project area and records at the Jacksonville District. The without

project deepening condition is for continuing maintenance of the existing 10-foot depth (Intracoastal Waterway) IWW channel, with maintenance to maintain the channels for both projects. A deepened access channel was analyzed from the existing ten-foot depth, in one-foot increments to a 16-foot depth. Each alternative depth considered includes a one-foot required and one-foot allowable over-depth. All alternative depth main access channels have a bottom width of 125 feet for about 0.7 miles<sup>2</sup> north and 4.5 miles south of the PBH project limit. Adding an appropriate depth access channel would enable larger vessels access to commercial repair and berthing facilities in the vicinity of PBH and improve operational efficiencies at other commercial and educational training facilities along Lake Worth.

The existing 1.6-mile Federal PBH navigation channel provides a 35 foot deep project through the ocean inlet, 33 feet through the inner channel and within the main turning basin, and 25 feet in a second turning basin, to berthing slips and wharves at PPBH, in West Palm Beach, Florida. PBH serves a variety of dry bulk, liquid bulk, and general cargo vessels calling at the Harbor in addition to smaller commercial and recreational boating interests. The present Section 107 study addresses and is focused on an extension of the harbor footprint to the north and south via the addition of main and interior access channels and berthing areas. The Jacksonville to Miami IWW, part of which is co-located with the Harbor and continues north and south from the Port, traverses the study area. This report's primary study area is a 5.2 mile reach of Lake Worth in Palm Beach County in the vicinity of PBH.

Several Federal navigation, beach erosion control, environmental restoration, and food control projects exist in the study area. The first navigation project is the PBH project. The second navigation project is the IWW from Jacksonville to Miami. Two beach erosion control projects exist along the Atlantic Ocean shoreline adjacent to PBH. Also, a section 1135 study was initiated during 1996 to examine environmental restoration of a portion of Peanut Island, the upland dredged material disposal site used in the PBH and IWW projects. The final project is the West Palm Beach Canal (C-51) that currently serves as a flood control structure, although initially constructed for navigation purposes.

**Alternatives:** Two basic sets of alternatives were considered for providing an access channel for

navigation in the Lake Worth study area. One is to do no further improvements to the project (no action plan). The second set of alternatives involve structural changes to (extension of) the existing PBH project. The alternative evaluations involved an assessment of the optimum channel depth to provide the greatest return on the investment (net benefits), the dredging equipment for performing the construction and maintenance work, and dredged material disposal options. The identification of these alternatives and options are discussed in the subsequent sections.

**Issues:** The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will consider impacts on seagrasses, protected species, health and safety, water quality, aesthetics and recreation, fish and wildlife resources, cultural resources, energy conservation, socio-economic resources, and other impacts identified through scoping, public involvement, and interagency coordination.

**Scoping:** A scoping letter was sent to interested parties on September 13, 2000 for the original Environmental Assessment of the project. Due to comments received, an EIS was judged needed and a new scoping letter will be sent out the first week of February 2003. In addition, all parties are invited to participate in the scoping process by identifying any additional concerns on issues, studies needed, alternatives, procedures, and other matters related to the scoping process. At this time, there are no plans for a public scoping meeting.

**Public Involvement:** We invite the participation of affected Federal, state and local agencies, affected Indian tribes, and other interested private organizations and parties.

**Coordination:** The proposed action is being coordinated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, with the FWS under the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, and with the State Historic Preservation Officer.

**Other Environmental Review and Consultation:** The proposed action would involve evaluation for compliance with guidelines pursuant to Section 404(b) of the Clean Water Act; application (to the State of Florida) for Water Quality Certification pursuant to Section 401 of the Clean Water Act; certification of state lands, easements, and rights of way; Essential Fish Habitat with National Marine Fisheries Service; and determination of Coastal Zone Management Act consistency.

**Agency Role:** As cooperating agency, non-Federal sponsor, and leading local expert; Palm Beach County Department

of Environmental Resources will provide extensive information and assistance on the resources to be impacted, mitigation measures, and alternatives.

*DEIS Preparation:* It is estimated that the DEIS will be available to the public on or about August 15, 2003.

Dated: February 4, 2003.

**George M. Strain,**

*Acting Chief, Planning Division.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

### Department of the Army; Corps of Engineers

#### Estuary Habitat Restoration Council; Meeting Cancellation

**AGENCY:** Department of the Army, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, DoD.

**ACTION:** Notice; cancellation.

**SUMMARY:** The public meeting of the Estuary Habitat Restoration Council scheduled for Wednesday, February 26, 2003 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. published in the **Federal Register** on Monday, February 10, 2003 (68 FR 6725) has been cancelled.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Ms. Ellen Cummings, Headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Washington, DC 20314-1000, (202) 761-4558; or Ms. Cynthia Garman-Squier, Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works), Washington, DC, (703) 695-6791.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** None.

**Luz D. Ortiz,**

*Army Federal Register Liaison Officer.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

### Department of the Navy

#### Notice of Intent To Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for Navy Air-To-Ground Training at Avon Park Air Force Range and To Announce Public Scoping Meetings

**AGENCY:** Department of the Navy, DOD.

**ACTION:** Notice.

**SUMMARY:** Pursuant to section (102)(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as implemented by the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 CFR parts 1500-1508), the Department of Navy (Navy) announces its intent to prepare an

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to evaluate the potential environmental consequences of utilizing Avon Park Air Force Range (APAFR) as a location for high explosive air-to-ground ordnance training for East Coast Carrier-based strike/fighter aviation squadrons. Squadrons would use APAFR in combination with other available air-to-ground range assets to meet the operational requirements of its structured aircrew-training program called the Inter-Deployment Training Cycle (IDTC). IDTC air-to-ground training will encompass operations associated with Navy intermediate and advanced level training exercises and combat certification. The EIS will focus on air-to-ground training alternatives within APAFR. These alternatives will encompass varying mixtures of ordnance types among three different ranges within APAFR.

**DATES AND ADDRESSES:** Three public scoping meetings will be held in Avon Park, Florida; Sebring, Florida; and in Frostproof, Florida to receive oral and written comments on environmental concerns that should be addressed in the EIS. Public scoping open houses will be held at the following dates, times, and locations:

—Tuesday, March 18, 2003, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., Frostproof High School Cafeteria, Frostproof, FL.

—Wednesday, March 19, 2003, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., Sebring Civic Center, Sebring, FL.

—March 20, 2003, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., The City of Avon Park Community Center, Avon Park, FL.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Mr. Will Sloger, Southern Div., Naval Facilities Engineering Command, PO Box 190010, North Charleston, SC 29419-9010; telephone (843) 820-5797; facsimile (843) 820-7472.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The Commander, U.S. Atlantic Fleet prepares Carrier Battlegroups (CVBGs) for deployment using a training process known as the "Inter-deployment Training Cycle (IDTC)." The IDTC prepares Navy personnel to function as a part of a coordinated fleet or joint fighting force with the capacity to accomplish multiple missions in a hostile environment. The IDTC is highly structured and features a three-phased building-block approach including basic, intermediate, and advanced phases. Mission activities conducted during the IDTC include integrated strike, close air support, combat search-and-rescue, unit level bombing, helicopter unit level terrain flight, and helicopter unit level air-to-ground training.

The Navy must deploy combat ready forces and considers training with live ordnance to be indispensable to achieving and maintaining combat readiness. The handling of live ordnance and the decision-making in the use of this ordnance provides Fleet sailors and airmen the greatest degree of combat training realism. Exposure to live ordnance is known to rivet the attention of those who manage, handle, and employ it with a combination of fear and respect that non-explosive ordnance cannot impart. Moreover, employment of explosive ordnance onboard an aircraft carrier involves the hazardous end-to-end weapons regime; to include breakout, build-up, and loading; to weapons release, impact, aircraft return and recovery, both day and night. On the ground, redundancy in the availability of disparate explosive targets helps reduce the likelihood of fratricide and collateral damage by ensuring a rigorous, combat-like training regimen prior to overseas deployment. In the end, tactical pilots and flight officers must have full confidence in their support personnel, their equipment and weapons systems, and in their ability to safely and effectively prosecute difficult target sets.

Explosive ordnance-capable ranges are limited to the Navy's Pinecastle Range and the Air Force's Eglin Air Force Base (Air Armament Center) on the East Coast of the United States. At these ranges, limitations exist with regard to range dimensions, run-in lines, the number of explosive ordnance target sets, fire index restrictions, and scheduling lead times, changes, and priorities. Consequently, explosive ordnance range capabilities must be expanded to a location proximate to planned Carrier Battlegroup Training in the Southeastern U.S. (Jacksonville and Gulf of Mexico Operational Areas) to reduce the potential for a single point of failure should the existing ranges be unavailable or unsuitable for a particular exercise. This location must have sufficient range area and suitably sized special use airspace to accommodate safe aircraft operations and ordnance delivery across the full spectrum of IDTC training.

The purpose of the proposed action, therefore, is to provide flexibility across the full spectrum of the IDTC for U.S. Atlantic Fleet aircrws. Navy use of APAFR as a location for explosive air-to-ground training would provide redundancy for explosive ordnance capabilities; increase combat realism, scheduling flexibility, and aimpoint variety; reduce undue operational impacts at any one location; and promote the benefits of multiple DOD,