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Corps will dredge Houma Navigation Canal

Rita shoaling hurts offshore oil-gas, fishing, shipbuilding

NEW ORLEANS—The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will begin dredging the Houma Navigation Canal about June 10 to relieve Hurricane Rita-caused shoaling that hampers the offshore-oil, fishing and shipbuilding industries.

“This project is important to America because it will help the domestic production of oil and gas in the Gulf of Mexico,” said Jane Brown, the Corps’ assistant operations manager for the 36-mile canal.

“Once the money became available, we got the contract out in record or near-record time,” Brown said.

The \$3.83 million dredging contract was awarded to Mike Hooks Inc. of Lake Charles. The contract calls for the removal of 700,000 cubic yards of material from the canal, which links the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway at Houma with the Gulf of Mexico.

Work has already begun to build dikes along four stretches of the canal to act as retaining walls for the dredged materials. Two of the dikes will help to restore a site with beneficial use of dredged material.

Houma is the seat of Terrebonne Parish, which has about 250 oil and gas-related companies, in addition to many shipbuilding yards and commercial fishing boats, said Roy Francis, a representative of the South Central Industrial Association, a trade group of the Houma Navigation Canal users.

“This is our lifeline. This is our way to deliver the products and services we provide. We have no railroad, no interstate,” Francis said. He is an executive of

Gulf Island Fabrication Inc., which employs thousands who build oil-production platforms.

The Corps is authorized by Congress to maintain a project depth and width of 15 feet and 150 feet, respectively, in the Houma Navigation Canal. Advance maintenance is customarily performed to avoid quick loss of authorized depth to shoaling after dredging. Thus, the Houma Navigation Canal will be dredged to a depth of 17 feet.

Dredging will be performed on reaches of the canal where Corps surveys have found depths shallower than 15 feet. The shallow reaches range non-continuously from the mouth of the canal to the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway at Houma. Dredging was completed earlier on the 10 miles in the open Gulf, where the water is less than 15 feet deep.

Meanwhile, Congressional authorization is pending for an \$887 million hurricane-protection project for the Houma area. Among other things, it would protect the canal from storm surge with a navigable lock and floodgate about 18 miles south of Houma.

The Morganza to the Gulf Hurricane Protection Project, as it is formally known, envisions 72 miles of levee, 13 navigable floodgates and 12 water-control structures. Project engineering and design are underway.

Morganza to the Gulf Project <http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/prj/mtog/>