

SCOPING REPORT

Southwest Coastal Louisiana Protection and Restoration Feasibility Study

Scoping Comments

August 2009

Table of Contents

Sections

1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
2.0 STUDY AUTHORITY.....	2
3.0 PROPOSED ACTION.....	3
4.0 SCOPING PROCESS	4
5.0 SCOPING PARTICIPANTS	6
6.0 SCOPING MEETING COMMENTS.....	6
7.0 ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC INPUT.....	10

Tables

Table 1. Comments by Mode and Location.....	6
Table 2. Themes by Percentage of Occurrence	7
Table 3: Categorization of Scoping Comments by Draft EIS Subject Matter.....	9

Appendices (available on request)

Includes scoping comments, meeting transcripts, comment cards received from Cameron, Calcasieu, and Vermilion Parish participants, letters and e-mails received from Cameron, Calcasieu, and Vermilion Parish residents, General letters and e-mails, Promotional Materials, Meeting Material Handouts, and Evaluation forms (Appendix pages 11 – 583 of the Scoping Report).

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 established a nationwide policy to include a detailed statement of the environmental impact in every recommendation or report on proposals for major Federal actions significantly affecting the environment. Such detailed statements are referred to as environmental impact statements (EISs).

A notice of intent (NOI) to prepare a draft EIS for the Southwest Coastal Louisiana Protection and Restoration Feasibility Study was published in the *Federal Register* (Volume 74, Number 38) on February 27, 2009. Scoping meeting announcements were advertised in five area newspapers leading up to the meetings. The meetings were held in Cameron Parish on Tuesday, March 24, 2009; Calcasieu Parish on Wednesday, March 25, 2009; and Vermilion Parish on Thursday, March 26, 2009.

The purpose of the NOI was to announce the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (USACE) intention to prepare a draft EIS that addresses the Southwest Coastal Louisiana Protection and Restoration Study. The purpose of the study is to determine the feasibility, based on Federal criteria, of providing coastal protection and restoration measures to the Southwest Louisiana parishes of Calcasieu, Cameron, and Vermilion, and recommend an implementable plan. Risk and reliability measures developed through the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration (LACPR) effort will also be utilized to evaluate alternatives. In addition to being considered as a primary solution and given that large-scale protection and restoration will not eliminate all damage from flooding and storms, nonstructural solutions will also be evaluated to address residual damages.

NEPA provides for an early and open public process for determining the scope of issues, resources, impacts, and alternatives to be addressed in an EIS (referred to as scoping). This scoping report outlines the Southwest Coastal Louisiana Protection and Restoration project background and scoping process to date, and summarizes the key issues identified by members of the public during the initial scoping period, which closed on April 14, 2009. Sections 5.0 and 6.0 of this report contain detailed analysis of the comments received. The top five themes identified by members of the public during the scoping period include:

- Storm surge risk reduction
- Importance of considering the entire scope of study and cumulative effects of other projects
- Coastal protection
- Impact of changes to drainage patterns, including dredging
- Importance of cooperation between Federal agencies, parishes, and stakeholders

2.0 STUDY AUTHORITY

Authority for the study exists under resolutions of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the U.S. House of Representatives in response to a request for support submitted by Congressman Boustany as follows:

December 6, 2005 – Letter from Congressman Boustany to the Chairman of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Congressman Boustany submitted a request for support to include a Survey Resolution for Southwest Coastal Louisiana on the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure (Committee) agenda for December 7, 2005. The request stated: “It is of vital importance that the Army Corps of Engineers survey the needs for providing hurricane protection and storm damage reduction for the Southwest Louisiana Parishes of Calcasieu, Cameron, and Vermilion. It is also important that the Corps examine the feasibility of constructing an armored 12-foot levee along the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway to protect Vermilion Parish from future storm surge.”

December 7, 2005 – Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, U.S. House of Representatives, Resolution, Docket 2747, Southwest Coastal Louisiana, LA

A resolution was adopted by the Committee that stated: “Resolved by the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the United States House of Representatives, that, in accordance with section 110 of the Rive and Harbor Act of 1962, the Secretary of the Army is requested to survey the coast of Louisiana in Cameron, Calcasieu, and Vermilion Parishes with particular reference to the advisability of providing hurricane protection and storm damage reduction and related purposes to include the feasibility of constructing an armored 12-foot levee along the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway.”

Shortly after authorizing the study, funding was appropriated as follows:

December 18, 2005 – House of Representative Conference Report, Report 109-359, Appropriations for the Department of Defense for the Fiscal Year ending September 30, 2006, Conference Report, Chapter 3, Department of Defense – Civil Department of the Army, Corps of Engineers – Civil

As part of the conference report on the Fiscal Year 2006 Department of Defense Appropriations Act, Congress allocated emergency funding to address water resources projects damaged by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Ophelia, and Wilma. Under Investigations, funds were provided to expedite ongoing studies in the areas affected by recent hurricanes.

3.0 PROPOSED ACTION

The Southwest Coastal Louisiana Protection and Restoration Study will include a comprehensive coastal protection and restoration evaluation for Calcasieu, Cameron, and Vermilion Parishes, LA. Section 7013 of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2007 authorizes the study. The study will be conducted by USACE and its cost-share partner, the State of Louisiana, through the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority.

Due to its close proximity to the Gulf of Mexico, the study area, which is characterized by low, flat terrain, is highly susceptible to flooding from tidal surges associated with hurricanes and tropical storms. Southwestern Louisiana has been affected by several named storms in the past 50 years. In addition, land subsidence is occurring along the coast of Louisiana and is expected to increase the potential for coastal flooding in the future. The objective of this feasibility study is to evaluate methods for effectively protecting and restoring communities, valuable infrastructure, and important natural habitat areas from future storm impacts.

The project area is located in the Chenier Plain, a region west of the Atchafalaya Bay in southwestern coastal Louisiana. USACE will evaluate a full suite of structural, nonstructural, and coastal restoration measures to achieve hurricane protection and storm damage risk reduction within the study area.

The study will address the following issues:

- Agriculture
- Altered circulation and water quality
- Bank and shoreline erosion
- Decreased freshwater, sediment, and nutrient inputs
- Habitat changes
- Human development susceptibility to storm surge (flood damages)
- Hydrologic modifications
- Navigation
- Ridge habitat degradation and destruction
- Saltwater intrusion
- Sea level rise
- Subsidence
- Wetland loss

The study will investigate the following opportunities:

- Bank protection/stabilization
- Beneficial use of dredged material
- Estuarine species management
- Flood control measures
- Floodproofing structures
- Flood relief structures
- Fortifying spoil banks
- Freshwater introduction/river diversions
- Hydrologic restoration
- Improving the existing Federal/non-Federal levees to a higher level of protection
- Increasing the height of existing oilfield canal spoil banks
- Levees
- Locks replacement and management
- Marsh creation and terracing
- Raising structures
- Relocating structures
- Revegetation

- Ridge restoration
- Road protection
- Salinity control structures
- Sediment management
- Shoreline protection
- Shoreline stabilization
- Utilizing the old Calcasieu lock for water evacuation
- Water level management
- Watershed management
- Water control structures

4.0 SCOPING PROCESS

NEPA affords all persons, organizations, and government agencies the right to review and comment on proposed major Federal actions that are evaluated by a NEPA document. Known as the scoping process, this is the initial step in the preparation of the EIS and helps identify: (1) the range of actions (project and procedural changes), (2) alternatives (both those to be explored rigorously and evaluated, and those that may be eliminated), and (3) the range of environmental resources considered in the evaluation of environmental impacts.

A. Public Notification

The public was notified of all three public meetings using the following communication mechanisms:

- An NOI to prepare a draft EIS was published in the *Federal Register* (Volume 74, Number 38) on February 27, 2009.
- A scoping meeting announcement requesting comments regarding the scope of the Southwest Coastal Louisiana Protection and Restoration Study was mailed to Federal, State, and local agencies and interested groups and individuals on March 13, 2009. The media advisory announcing the scoping meeting was provided to more than 200 media outlets.
- An advertisement for the public scoping meeting appeared in the following publications:
The Times-Picayune (New Orleans), March 19, 2009
The Baton Rouge Advocate (Baton Rouge), March 19, 2009
The Cameron Pilot (Cameron Parish), March 19, 2009
The Lake Charles American Press (Calcasieu Parish), March 19, 2009
The Abbeville Meridional (Vermilion Parish), March 19, 2009

B. Scoping Meetings

The public scoping meetings were held as follows:

- **Cameron Parish** **Tuesday, March 24, 2009**
Cameron Parish Courthouse 6:00 – 9:00 p.m.
119 Smith Circle
Cameron, LA 70631
- **Calcasieu Parish** **Wednesday, March 25, 2009**
Central School Arts and Humanities Center 6:00 – 9:00 p.m.

809 Kirby Street
Lake Charles, LA 70601

- **Vermilion Parish**
Abbeville High School
1305 Wildcat Drive
Abbeville, LA 70510

Thursday, March 26, 2009
6:00 – 9:00 p.m.

The advertised schedule for each scoping meeting was:

- Open House 6:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.
- Introductions 6:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.
- Small Group Sessions 7:00 p.m. – 7:45 p.m.
- Group Reports 7:45 p.m. – 8:15 p.m.
- Question and Answer Session 8:15 p.m. – 8:50 p.m.
- Wrap-up 8:50 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

The open house session provided attendees with an opportunity to visit a series of poster stations staffed by project team members and subject matter experts regarding the following topics: the Southwest Coastal Louisiana Protection and Restoration Study, issues and opportunities associated with the study, the NEPA process and milestones, and maps of the study area.

Following the open house, there was a brief presentation on the Southwest Coastal effort planned for the area and a description of the NEPA process. During this segment, the Southwest Coastal Environmental Manager and both the USACE and Louisiana Department of Natural Resources Project Managers presented introductory remarks, including the agenda, purpose of the meeting, public involvement under NEPA, a brief history leading to the study, the scope of the analysis, and the intent to prepare a draft EIS for the Southwest Coastal Louisiana Protection and Restoration Study.

The question and answer session was moved up in the agenda and took place immediately following the introductions at all three meetings. The session focused on the study process and any other general questions presented by attendees. Following this portion, the floor was opened for scoping comments. Individuals were invited to present their verbal scoping comments to be recorded without interruption. The floor remained open until no further scoping comments were given. Small group sessions were eliminated at the Cameron and Lake Charles meetings because the number of attendees allowed for one group discussion. One scoping comment period was held in lieu of breakout groups. At Abbeville, however, two breakout group sessions were held with group reports immediately following.

During the wrap-up, attendees were reminded to pick up self-mailing comment cards, should they wish to submit additional comments at a later date, and to drop off the meeting evaluation forms at the registration table. Transcripts of comments made at the scoping meetings were prepared by court reporters.

Send e-mail comments to: Sandra.E.Stiles@usace.army.mil

Visit the project Web site at: www.mvn.usace.army.mil

Mail comments to: Southwest Coastal Louisiana Feasibility Study
 EIS Manager
 CEMVN-PM-RS
 P.O. Box 60267
 New Orleans, LA 70160-0267

This Scoping Report presents and summarizes the scoping comments expressed at the public scoping meetings, as well as all other scoping comments received during the comment period beginning February 27, 2009, and ending April 14, 2009. This Scoping Report indicates where in the draft EIS individual comments will be addressed. The report will be provided to all scoping participants who provided their address, and will be published on the www.mvn.usace.army.mil Web site.

5.0 SCOPING PARTICIPANTS

A total of 280 people attended the three scoping meetings, with 51 in Cameron Parish, 59 in Calcasieu Parish, and 170 in Vermilion Parish. These included, but were not limited to, private citizens, stakeholders, non-governmental organizations, and political representatives.

See Appendix C for a complete list of participants.

6.0 SCOPING MEETING COMMENTS

Scoping comments document the public’s concerns about the scope of the proposed course of action, as well as identify significant resources and suggested alternatives. Scoping comments will be considered during the study process and preparation of the draft EIS.

Table 1. Comments by Mode and Location

Location	Scoping Meeting	Comment Card	Letter	E-mail	Evaluation Form
Cameron Parish	35	6	4	3	5
Calcasieu Parish	27	0	2	3	2
Vermilion Parish	39	4	0	5	4
Total	101	10	6	11	11

A. Scoping Comment Categorization by Theme

The 382 specific comments received were categorized by concern or issue identified by the commenters. A concern or issue raised more than three times became a theme. A total of 13 recurring themes were identified, including an “other” category. The “other” category includes issues or concerns that were raised only once, or comments that were not directly related to the proposed action, such as *“The meeting needs to be earlier. A meeting from 6-9 p.m. is a bit much.”* Each comment was assigned to only one theme. The top five themes are discussed in this section.

Table 2 below shows themes ranked by number and percentage of occurrence.

Table 2. Themes by Percentage of Occurrence

Rank	Theme	Number of Comments	Percent Occurrence
1.	Storm risk reduction	57	14.9%
2.	Importance of considering entire scope of study and cumulative effects of other projects	53	13.9%
3.	Coastal protection	52	13.6%
4.	Impact of changes to drainage patterns	38	9.9%
5.	Importance of cooperation between Federal agencies, parishes, and stakeholders	34	8.9%
6.	Timeframe and funding related to project implementation	27	7.1%
8.	Salinity and saltwater intrusion	23	6.0%
9.	Wetlands protection/restoration	22	5.8%
10.	Protection of existing developed land	18	4.7%
11.	Permitting issues	15	3.9%
12.	Concern regarding loss of Highway 82	12	3.1%
13.	Impacts to Wildlife	4	1.0%
7.	Other*	27	7.1%
	Total:	382	100.0%

* Comments categorized as “other” included comments that either occurred only once, or comments that were not directly related to the proposed action.

1. Storm surge protection

A total of 57 comments were related to concerns and issues surrounding storm surge risk reduction measures such as levees. Comments suggested methods for building levees. For example, “*Build a levee with rocks and build up the land behind the rocks. This could be done faster than anything else.*” In general, the comments were related to placement, design features, and the use of levees in combination with other protection and restoration measures.

2. Importance of considering entire scope of study and other projects in the area

Individuals submitted comments addressing the importance of examining the area as a whole, rather than project-specific items. Concerns were raised about the impact to adjacent parishes as well as to the commercial fishing industry. Several comments pertained to the future impact of the project on the area. For instance, “*The Corps and the state should be cognizant and aware of potential impacts on a much larger planning horizon. The selected plan will most likely continue to have impacts on the landscape for multiple generations and potentially thousands of years.*”

3. Coastal protection

A total of 52 comments related to the importance of coastal protection. Several commenters pointed to the importance of urgent coastal protection implementation. “*If we do not restore/protect our coastline and install some sort of barrier to slow storm surge, any wetland restoration will be void. I feel that it is vital to have coastline restoration/protection as the*

number one priority.” Many of the remaining comments were related to the rate at which beach erosion is occurring in the area. For example, “We have some areas of rapid land loss that if not addressed will lead to serious land loss. The water will be all the way up to 82, as it is in the Johnson Bayou area.”

4. Impact of changes to drainage patterns

Concerns related to drainage patterns accounted for 9.9 percent of the comments. These commenters urged for further study for specific areas. One commenter said, *“Drainage should be a higher priority than building a barrier. Our problem is water influx from the Gulf.”* Other commenters underlined the need to consider the project impacts from a watershed (top-down) perspective.

5. Importance of cooperation between Federal agencies, parishes, and stakeholders

These comments addressed the need for all stakeholders to communicate and cooperate to ensure appropriate and timely project implementation. For example, *“I ask the Corps of Engineers to please consider and discuss this project with the people who work with the coastal protection agencies locally. They have designed different structures and devised plans for these problems we are having. It is easy to get with them and they will tell you what the communities need. Please add the parish plan into the study and consider the affects your project will have on this parish.”*

B. Scoping Comments Categorization in EIS

A scoping comment may contain several specific comments directed at multiple areas of concern. As a result, a single comment could potentially be generally addressed in multiple sections of the draft EIS. A total of 382 specific comments were provided (See Appendix A for details on individual comments).

The comments were categorized according to their applicability to the draft EIS. Draft EIS categories include: Future Condition without Project/Purpose and Need; Coastal Restoration Efforts; Structural Efforts; Nonstructural Efforts; and Consultation, Coordination, and Compliance with Regulations. An individual scoping comment may be categorized under more than one draft EIS subject matter heading.

Future Condition without Project/Purpose and Need

The majority of comments received in this category indicated a public concern regarding upstream drainage issues and saltwater intrusion in the area. For instance, *“We will not be able to farm because of the salt salinities left on the properties from Ike. Our storm surge and our saltwater are implemented mainly through the ship channel. As that keeps getting wider and deeper, we see more salinity levels and it is harder to operate rice farms.”* Some commenters thought the main priority for this project should be the protection of existing developments and the freedom of landowners to do what they want with their properties. For example, *“Please respect our rural way of life and add protection measures which seek to preserve all of our existing communities and existing developments without any additional development restrictions.”*

Coastal Restoration Efforts

Concerns related to the importance of marsh protection and wetlands restoration were the most commonly received in this category. For instance, *“If you do restoration, you will provide some protection. Both restoration and protection should be treated equally and one should not be put in front of the other. By doing protection, you are creating restoration and vice versa.”* Other concerns relating to the importance of the protection of existing coastal developments were also received.

Structural Efforts

Commenters indicated a preference for protective structures located in the water rather than land-based structures. For instance, *“After Ike there was a massive amount of water sitting on Cameron and Vermilion Parish. This water could not get out of the marsh; it instead went underground and saturated the area. Any land-based levees that you put up will be subject to this type of saturation and instability. Therefore, a levee should be built in the Gulf vs. on land.”* Some indicated a concern for aesthetics of any proposed levees, while others were primarily concerned with the preservation of land and existing developments. For example, *“We would like to protect as much of the developed area as we can. Protection methods involving set backs, bumper zones, or easements should be minimized or placed away from areas which are already developed. We ask that those ‘methods’ be placed away from our populated areas, no matter how sparsely populated.”*

Nonstructural Efforts

The majority of comments received in this category underlined the need for dredging in some areas, and sedimentation in other areas. For instance, *“We propose a sediment bypass project at the Mermentau River and potentially at the Calcasieu ship channel because the jetties are accumulating sediment on the eastern side. The western side is being starved for sediment.”* Other comments indicated that residents are interested in the potential dredging and use of dredged material in the area. For example, *“Interested to know if the study will look at dredge material for beneficial use—using dredge displacement as a protection barrier for certain communities.”*

Consultation, Coordination, and Compliance with Regulations

The need for continued public participation was the most often expressed concern in this category. For instance, *“This study must include the local resident’s participation from start to finish.”* Other commenters stressed the importance of cooperation between parishes as well as Federal agencies involved in various projects in the area.

Table 3 displays the categorization of specific comments at all meetings by draft EIS subject matter heading. The most comments were expressed regarding Future Condition without Project/Purpose and Need, followed by Structural Efforts; Consultation, Coordination, and Compliance with Regulations; Nonstructural Efforts; and Coastal Restoration Efforts.

Table 3: Categorization of Scoping Comments by Draft EIS Subject Matter

Source of Comment	FC/PN	CR	ST	NS	CCC	Totals
Scoping Meeting	88	49	70	55	66	328
Comment Cards	6	2	9	3	4	24

Source of Comment	FC/PN	CR	ST	NS	CCC	Totals
Comment Letters	7	17	18	25	28	95
Comment E-mails	12	14	14	18	10	68
Evaluation Forms	16	4	3	5	3	31
Totals	129	86	114	106	111	546

Note: *A single comment may be categorized under multiple subject matter headings.*

FC/PN = Future Condition without Project/Purpose and Need
CR = Coastal Restoration Efforts
ST = Structural Efforts
NS = Nonstructural Efforts
CCC = Consultation, Coordination, and Compliance with Regulations

Tables 4, 5, and 6 (found in the Appendix) summarize each of the scoping comments received at the individual scoping meetings in Cameron, Calcasieu, and Vermilion Parishes, and indicate by draft EIS subject matter heading where an individual scoping comments would likely be addressed in the draft EIS. Table 7 (in the Appendix) provides the same information for comments received via mail and e-mail that pertained to the overall study and were not linked to a specific meeting.

7.0 ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC INPUT

The official deadline for receipt of comments for the preliminary scoping was April 14, 2009. USACE New Orleans District will consider and continue to receive comments on this project as the alternatives are being considered and the draft EIS is being developed. Once the draft EIS is completed, it will be available for a 45-day public review, which is currently scheduled for December 2012.