

## Brazos Island Harbor Channel Improvement Project Feasibility Study

The Port of Brownsville is located on the south Texas coast near the U.S. – Mexican border and is the only deep draft port available to the industries along the Texas – Mexican border. The Brownsville port is primarily a bulk commodity port covering both liquid and dry cargo handling.

In 2002, Brownsville was the nation's second largest in-transit harbor by volume. Total tonnage on the Brazos Island Harbor increased from 1,829,000 tons in 1991 to 4,741,000 tons in 2002. The increased traffic is a direct result of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) as a majority of the increased commodity traffic is to meet industrial needs in Mexico. In addition to traditional vessel traffic, there is a need for increased channel dimensions to serve offshore drilling rigs presently operating off the U.S. Gulf Coast. The operational draft of the newer rigs range from 45 feet to 63 feet.

The most recent channel deepening was authorized by the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 1986. The construction was completed in 1996. The existing entrance channel is 44 feet deep by 300 feet wide for a distance of 2.5 miles. The main channel is 42 feet deep by 250 feet wide within the inland segment of the waterway for 14.8 miles. Also there is 42 foot deep turning basin, varying in widths from 325 feet to 400 feet for 1 mile with the final segment of the turning basin at a depth of 36 feet and a width of 1,200 feet.

The feasibility study, which began in June 2006, will investigate the potential of deepening the entrance channel to 50 feet, the main channel to 48 feet and widening to 400 feet. It will also investigate potential restoration opportunities of over 6,500 acres of tidal marsh habitats, as well as brush habitat within the Bahia Grande. Marsh restoration would provide feeding, breeding and wintering habitat for colonial and migratory water fowl and provide habitat connections to the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge.



Vicinity map: Brazos Island Harbor