

Permitting Overview

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General Information

Authority for the Regulatory Program

The US Army Corps of Engineers has been regulating activities in the nation's waters since 1890. Until the 1960's the primary purpose of the regulatory program was to protect navigation. Since then, as a result of laws and court decisions, the program has been broadened so that it now considers the full public interest for both the protection and utilization of water resources.

The regulatory authorities and responsibilities of the Corps of Engineers are based on the following laws:

- Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 (33 U.S.C. 403) prohibits the obstruction or alteration of navigable waters of the United States without a permit from the Corps of Engineers.
- Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1344). Section 301 of this Act prohibits the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States without a permit from the Corps of Engineers.
- Section 103 of the Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act of 1972, as amended (33 U.S.C. 1413) authorizes the Corps of Engineers to issue permits for the transportation of dredged material for the purpose of dumping it into ocean waters.

Other laws may also affect the processing of applications for Corps of Engineers permits. Among these are the National Environmental Policy Act, the Coastal Zone Management Act, the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, the Endangered Species Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, the Deepwater Port Act, the Federal Power Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and the National Fishing Enhancement Act of 1984.

Explanation of Some Commonly Used Terms

Certain terms which are closely associated with the regulatory program are explained briefly in this section. If you need more detailed definitions, refer to the Code of Federal Regulations (33 CFR Parts 320 through 330) or contact a Corps district regulatory office.

Activity(ies) as used in this pamphlet includes structures (for example a pier, wharf, bulkhead, or jetty) and work (which includes dredging, disposal of dredged material, filling, excavation or other modification of a navigable water of the United States).

Navigable Waters of the United States are those waters of the United States that are subject to the ebb and flow of the tide shoreward to the mean high water mark and/or are presently used, or have been used in the past or may be susceptible to use to transport interstate or foreign commerce. These are waters that are navigable in the traditional sense where permits are required for certain activities pursuant to Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act. This term should not be confused with the term *waters of the United States* below.

Waters of the United States is a broader term than navigable waters of the United States defined above. Included are adjacent wetlands and tributaries to navigable waters of the United States and other waters where the degradation or destruction of which could affect interstate or foreign commerce. These are the waters where permits are required for the discharge of dredged or fill material pursuant to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

Pre-application Consultation is one or more meetings between members of the district engineer's staff and an applicant and his agent or his consultant. A pre-application consultation is usually related to applications for major activities and may involve discussion of alternatives, environmental documents, National Environmental Policy Act procedures, and development of the scope of the data required when an environmental impact statement is required.

Public Hearings may be held to acquire information and give the public the opportunity to present views and opinions. The Corps may hold a hearing or participate in joint public hearings with other Federal or state agencies. The district engineer may specify in the public notice that a hearing will be held. In addition, any person may request in writing during the comment period that a hearing be held. Specific reasons must be given as to the need for a hearing. The district engineer may attempt to resolve the issue informally or he may set the date for a public hearing. Hearings are held at times and places that are convenient for the interested public. Very few applications involve a public hearing.

The Public Interest Review is the term which refers to the evaluation of a proposed activity to determine probable impacts. Expected benefits are balanced against reasonably foreseeable detriments. All relevant factors are weighed. Corps policy is to provide applicants with a timely and carefully weighed decision which reflects the public interest.

Public Notice is the primary method of advising interested public agencies and private parties of the proposed activity and of soliciting comments and information necessary to evaluate the probable impact on the public interest. Upon request, anyone's name will be added to the distribution list to receive public notices.

Waterbody is a river, creek, stream, lake, pool, bay, wetland, marsh, swamp, tidal flat, ocean, or other water area.

Questions That Are Frequently Asked

Various questions are often asked about the regulatory program. It is hoped that these answers will help you to understand the program better.

Q. When should I apply for a Corps permit?

A. Since two to three months is normally required to process a routine application involving a public notice, you should apply as early as possible to be sure you have all required approvals before your planned commencement date. For a large or complex activity that may take longer, it is often helpful to have a "pre-application consultation" or informal meeting with the Corps during the early planning phase of your project. You may receive helpful information at this point which could prevent delays later. When in doubt as to whether a permit may be required or what you need to do, don't hesitate to call a district regulatory office.

Q. I have obtained permits from local and state governments. Why do I have to get a permit from the Corps of Engineers?

A. It is possible you may not have to obtain an individual permit, depending on the type or location of work. The Corps has many general permits which authorize minor activities without the need for individual processing. Check with your Corps district regulatory office for information on general permits. When a general permit does not apply, you may still be required to obtain an individual permit.

Q. What will happen if I do work without getting a permit from the Corps?

A. Performing unauthorized work in waters of the United States or failure to comply with the terms of a valid permit can have serious consequences. You would be in violation of Federal law and could face stiff penalties, including fines and/or requirements to restore the area.

Enforcement is an important part of the Corps regulatory program. Corps surveillance and monitoring activities are often aided by various agencies, groups, and individuals, who report suspected violations. When in doubt as to whether a planned activity needs a permit, contact the nearest district regulatory office. It could save a lot of unnecessary trouble later.

Q. How can I obtain further information about permit requirements?

A. Information about the regulatory program is available from any Corps district regulatory office. Information may also be obtained from the water resource agency in your state.

Q. Can I transfer my permit to a third party?

A. Yes. It is simply a matter of informing your district. To download the form used in the New Orleans District go to [Transfer Form](#).

Q. Why should I waste my time and yours by applying for a permit when you probably won't let me do the work anyway?

A. Nationwide, only three percent of all requests for permits are denied. Those few applicants who have been denied permits usually have refused to change the design, timing, or location of the proposed activity. When a permit is denied, an applicant may redesign the project and submit a new application. To avoid unnecessary delays pre-application conferences, particularly for applications for major activities, are recommended. The Corps will endeavor to give you helpful information, including factors which will be considered during the public interest review, and alternatives to consider that may prove to be useful in designing a project.

Q. What is a wetland and what is its value?

A. Wetlands are areas that are periodically or permanently inundated by surface or ground water and support vegetation adapted for life in saturated soil. Wetlands include swamps, marshes, bogs and similar areas. A significant natural resource, wetlands serve important functions relating to fish and wildlife; food chain production; habitat; nesting; spawning; rearing and resting sites for aquatic and land species; protection of other areas from wave action and erosion; storage areas for storm and flood waters; natural recharge areas where ground and surface water are interconnected; and natural water filtration and purification functions.

Although individual alterations of wetlands may constitute a minor change, the cumulative effect of numerous changes often results in major damage to wetland resources. The review of applications for alteration of wetlands will include consideration of whether the proposed activity is dependent upon being located in an aquatic environment.

Q. How can I design my project to eliminate the need for a Corps permit?

A. If your activity is located in an area of tidal waters, the best way to avoid the need for a permit is to select a site that is above the high tide line and avoids wetlands or other waterbodies. In the vicinity of fresh water, stay above ordinary high water and avoid wetlands adjacent to the stream

or lake. Also, it is possible that your activity is exempt and does not need a Corps permit or that it has been authorized by a nationwide or regional general permit. So, before you build, dredge or fill, contact the Corps district regulatory office in your area for specific information about location, exemptions, and regional and nationwide general permits.

The Permit Application

General

The application form used to apply for a permit is Engineer Form 4345, *Application of a Department of the Army Permit*. You can obtain the necessary forms by following this [link](#). Some offices may use a slightly modified form for joint processing with a state agency; however, the required information is basically the same. It is important that you provide the complete information in the requested format. This information will be used to determine the appropriate form of authorization, and to evaluate your proposal.

Some categories of activities have been previously authorized by nationwide or regional permits, and no further Corps approvals are required. Others may qualify for abbreviated permit processing, with authorizations in the form of letters of permission, in which a permit decision can usually be reached in less than 30 days. For other activities, a Public Notice may be required to notify Federal, state, and local agencies, adjacent property owners, and the general public of the proposal to allow an opportunity for review and comment or to request a public hearing. Most applications involving Public Notices are completed within four months and many are completed within 60 days.

The district engineer will begin to process your application immediately upon receipt of all required information. You will be sent an acknowledgement of its receipt and the application number assigned to your file. You should refer to this number when inquiring about your application. Your proposal will be reviewed, balancing the need and expected benefits against the probable impacts of the work, taking into consideration all comments received and other relevant factors. This process is called the *public interest review*. The Corps goal is to reach a decision regarding permit issuance or denial within 60 days of receipt of a complete application. However, some complex activities, issues, or requirements of law may prevent the district engineer from meeting this goal.

Answers to technical questions and information specific to proposed actions can be obtained from the Operations Division, **Regulatory Branch, New Orleans District** by calling **(504) 862-2276, -2044, or -2261**.

Typical Processing Procedure for a Standard Individual Permit

1. Pre-application consultation (optional)
2. Applicant submits ENG Form 4345 to district regulatory office*
3. Application received and assigned identification number
4. Public notice issued (within 15 days of receiving all information)
5. 30 day comment period depending upon nature of activity

6. Proposal is reviewed** by Corps and:
 - o Public
 - o Federally Recognized Tribes
 - o Special interest groups
 - o Local agencies
 - o State agencies
 - o Federal agencies
7. Corps considers all comments
8. Other Federal agencies consulted, if appropriate
9. District engineer may ask applicant to provide additional information
10. Public hearing held, if needed
11. District engineer makes decision
12. Permit issued
 - or
 - Permit denied and applicant advised of reason

* A local variation, often a joint federal-state application form may be submitted.

** Review period may be extended if applicant fails to submit information or due to requirements of certain laws.

Evaluation Factors

The decision whether to grant or deny a permit is based on a public interest review of the probable impact of the proposed activity and its intended use. Benefits and detriments are balanced by considering effects on items such as:

- conservation
- economics
- aesthetics
- general environmental concerns
- wetlands
- cultural resources/historic properties
- flood hazards
- floodplain values
- food and fiber production
- navigation
- shore erosion and accretion
- recreation
- water supply and conservation
- water quality
- energy needs
- safety
- needs and welfare of the people
- considerations of private ownership

The following general criteria will be considered in the evaluation of every application:

- the relative extent of the public and private need for the proposed activity;
- the practicability of using reasonable alternative locations and methods to accomplish the objective of the proposed activity; and
- the extent and permanence of the beneficial and/or detrimental effects which the proposed activity is likely to have on the public and private uses to which the area is suited.

Section 404(b)(1) of the Clean Water Act

If your project involves the discharge of dredged or fill material, it will be necessary for the Corps to evaluate your proposed activity under the Section 404(b)(1) guidelines prepared by the Environmental Protection Agency. The guidelines restrict discharges into aquatic areas where less environmentally damaging, practicable alternatives exist.

Forms and Permits

The following forms apply to the permit process:

Application

The form that you will need to initiate the review process is ENG Form 4345 or a joint Federal-state application that may be available in your state. The appropriate form may be obtained from the district regulatory office which has jurisdiction in the area where your proposed project is located.

Individual Permits

An individual permit may be issued as either ENG Form 1721, the standard permit, or as a Letter of Permission.

- A standard permit is one processed through the typical review procedures, which include public notice, opportunity for a public hearing, and receipt of comments. It is issued following a case-by-case evaluation of a specific activity.
- If work is minor or routine with minimum impacts and objections are unlikely, then it may qualify for a Letter of Permission (LOP). An LOP can be issued much more quickly than a standard permit since an individual public notice is not required. The District Engineer will notify you if your proposed activity qualifies for an LOP.

General Permits

In many cases the formal processing of a permit application is not required because of general

permits already issued to the public at large by the Corps of Engineers. These are issued on a regional and nationwide basis.

Separate applications may not be required for activities authorized by a general permit; nevertheless, reporting may be required. For specific information on general permits, contact a district regulatory office.

ENG Form 4336

The third form, ENG Form 4336, is used to assist with surveillance for unauthorized activities. The form, which contains a description of authorized work, should be posted at the site of an authorized activity. If the Corps decides it is appropriate for you to post this form, it will be furnished to you when you receive your permit.

Fees

Fees are required for most permits. \$10.00 will be charged for a permit for a non-commercial activity; \$100.00 will be charged for a permit for a commercial or industrial activity. The district engineer will make the final decision as to the amount of the fee. ***Do not send a fee when you submit an application.*** When the Corps issues a permit, you will be notified and asked to submit the required fee payable to the Treasurer of the United States. No fees are charged for transferring a permit from one property owner to another, for Letters of Permission, or for any activities authorized by a general permit or for permits to governmental agencies.

The following describes how to prepare required supporting documentation to accompany your permit application form.

Drawings

General Information

Three types of drawings - Vicinity, Plan, and Elevation - are required to accurately depict activities.

Submit one original, or good quality copy, of all drawings on 8½ X 11 inch white paper (tracing cloth or film may be used). If your project is within the Louisiana coastal zone 8 sets of the application and drawings will be needed when the application is forwarded to the Department of Natural Resources, Coastal Management Section. Submit the fewest number of sheets necessary to adequately show the proposed activity. Drawings should be prepared in accordance with the general format of the samples, using block style lettering. Each page should have a title block. See check list below. Drawings do not have to be prepared by an engineer, but professional assistance may become necessary if the project is large or complex.

Leave a 1-inch margin at the top edge of each sheet for purposes of reproduction and binding.

In the title block of each sheet of drawings identify the proposed activity and include the name of the body of water; river mile (if applicable); name of county and state; name of applicant; number of the sheet and total number of sheets in set; and date the drawing was prepared.

Large drawings that are reduced to fit on an 8.5 by 11-inch sheet are normally not acceptable since notes and dimensions often become unreadable. Also, clarity is lost through reproduction processes. If, however, the reduced drawings are clear and readable, they will be acceptable.

Since drawings must be reproduced, use heavy dark lines. Color shading cannot be used; however, dot shading, hatching, or similar graphic symbols may be used to clarify line drawings.

In addition to the 8 1/2 by 11-inch permit application drawings, applicants should provide large scale drawings for any permit request that: a)Crosses the Mississippi and Atchafalaya Rivers, Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, Inner Harbor Navigation Canal, Harvey Canal, Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet, and the flood control features (Levees and/or floodwalls, both Mississippi River & Tributaries and Hurricane Protection)with ramps, roadways, pipelines, powerlines, and pipe racks; b)excavates borrow pits on the battures; c)directional drills any pipelines under the river and levees or under the river but not under the levees; d)stockpiles sand on the batture; e)dredges in the river for sand and stockpiles on the batture; and/or f)constructs any buildings within 1,500 feet of the Mississippi River levees. Cross sections must be plotted to a NATURAL SCALE of 1" equals 20' horizontally and vertically. Plan views should be plotted to a scale of 1" equals 50' or 100', depending on the permit, and must show the USACE levee baseline, if the permit is for a crossing of the federal flood control system.

SAMPLE DRAWINGS

Vicinity Map

The vicinity map you provide will be printed in any public notice that is issued and used by the Corps of Engineers and other reviewing agencies to locate the site of the proposed activity. You may use an existing road map or US Geological Survey topographic (scale 1:24,000) as the vicinity map. Please include sufficient details to simplify locating the site from both the waterbody and from land. Identify the source of the map or chart from which the vicinity map was taken and, if not already shown, add the following:

- location of activity site (draw an arrow showing the exact location of the site on the map).
- latitude, longitude, river mile, if known, and/or other information that coincides with Block 6 on the application form.
- name of waterbody and the name of the larger creek, river, by, etc., that the waterbody is immediately tributary to.
- names, descriptions and location of landmarks.
- name of all applicable political (county, parish, borough, town, city, etc.) jurisdictions
- name of and distance to nearest town, community, or other identifying locations
- names or numbers of all roads in the vicinity of the site.
- north arrow.
- scale.

Plan View

The plan view shows the proposed activity as if you were looking straight down on it from above. your plan view should clearly show the following:

- Name of waterbody (river, creek, lake, wetland, etc.) and river mile (if known) at location of activity.
- Existing shorelines.
- Mean high and mean low water lines and maximum (spring) high tide line in tidal areas.
- Ordinary high water line and ordinary low water line if the proposed activity is located on a non-tidal waterbody.
- Average water depths around the activity.
- Dimensions of the activity and distance it extends from the high water line into the water.
- Distances to nearby Federal projects, if applicable.
- Distance between proposed activity and navigation channel, where applicable.
- Location of structures, if any, in navigable waters immediately adjacent to the proposed activity.
- Location of any wetlands (marshes, swamps, tidal flats, etc.)
- North arrow.
- Scale.
- If dredged material is involved, you must describe the type of material, number of cubic yards, method of handling, and the location of fill and spoil disposal area. The drawing should show proposed retention levees, weirs, and/or other means for retaining hydraulically placed materials.
- Mark the drawing to indicate previously completed portions of the activity.

Elevation and/or Cross Section View

The elevation and/or cross section view is a scale drawing that shows the side, front, or rear of the proposed activity. If a section view is shown, it represents the proposed structure as it would appear if cut internally for display. Your elevation should clearly show the following:

- Water elevations as shown in the plan view.
- Water depth at waterward face of proposed activity or, if dredging is proposed, dredging and estimated disposal grades.
- Dimensions from mean high water line (in tidal waters) of proposed fill or float, or high tide line for pile supported platform. Describe any structures to be built on the platform.
- Cross section of excavation or fill, including approximate side slopes.
- Graphic or numerical scale.
- Principal dimensions of the activity.

Notes on Drawings*

- Names of adjacent property owners who may be affected. Complete names and addresses should be shown in Block 5 on ENG Form 4345.
- Legal property description: Number, name of subdivision, block, and lot number. Section, Township, and Range (if applicable) from plot, deed, or tax assessment.
- Photographs of the site of the proposed activity are not required; however, pictures are helpful and may be submitted as part of any application.
- **While illustrations need not be professional (many small, private project illustrations are prepared by hand), they should be clear, accurate, and contain all necessary information.**
- Technical Specifications for Permit Applications near Federal Navigation Channels and Flood Protection Structures

* Drawings should be as clear and simple as possible (ie, not too "busy").

[Click here to follow a flowchart to get you the forms you need.](#)