

Perkins Pier Marina
Burlington, Chittenden County, Vermont
F16AP00027 – Boating Infrastructure Tier II Project

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Background

Burlington is the largest community in Vermont, and the largest community on Lake Champlain. Public interest in and use of the Burlington waterfront has been increasing as access has been improved and amenities have been added in recent years. While many land-side improvements have been made that draw recreational boaters to the area from around the Lake, fewer water-side improvements have been made. The most important piece of infrastructure for the harbor is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (“USACE”) breakwater that was constructed in the 1890s. Although this structure is critical to the overall functioning of the harbor, it does not provide sufficient protection for modern recreational watercraft and the expanded needs of the boating community. In recent years, the length of the waiting list for seasonal boaters who wish to dock at the Burlington waterfront has grown to be 10 years long. Furthermore, hundreds of overnight transient boaters are turned away each year due to a lack of facilities that could accommodate them.

To support current and anticipated future demands, the City of Burlington (“the City”) identified the need for additional boat slips and a wave attenuation structure. The Project Area is located generally within Lake Champlain between Perkins Pier and the municipal waste water treatment plant in Burlington, Chittenden County, Vermont. The Project Area includes a floating wave attenuator and associated docking system that extends approximately 780 feet into the Lake from the shore. The project has been selected for partial funding through the Boating Infrastructure Grant Program.

The scoping process was initiated through the development of the “PlanBTV Downtown and Waterfront” Master Plan, which was extensively reviewed by the City and members of the affected public prior to its adoption in 2013. This Plan identified that improvements to the Perkins Pier Marina, including the proposed wave attenuator, were a vital part of the continued redevelopment of the Burlington waterfront. Over the course of a two-year process, hundreds of comments were submitted by members of the public during draft document review, a multi-day design charrette, and through the PlanBTV website.

The Perkins Pier Marine Expansion Environmental Assessment (EA) was put out for Public Notice on July 1, 2016 through the City’s website and its social media feeds. A PDF copy was made available for download, and a hard copy placed in the Clerk/Treasurer’s Office. The individuals that expressed interest in the project during the scoping process were notified that the document was available for review.

Proposed Actions and Alternatives Considered

The EA examines three alternatives: No-action Alternative (Alternative A); Floating Marina and Wave Attenuator (Alternative B); and Floating Marina with Solid-Fill Breakwater Alternative (Alternative C). The alternative that best met the navigational safety, environmental, and technical criteria for the Project was selected as the Proposed Action. Criteria used in selecting the Proposed Action include: provide improved sheltering for moorings or boat slips behind the existing breakwater; improve navigation by clearly separating moorings and dock areas from channels; and minimize adverse environmental impacts.

Alternative A (the No-Action Alternative) represents the existing condition. If selected, the No-Action Alternative would result in no construction taking place and no changes to the availability of moorings and boat slips that are sheltered from wave action. The existing waiting list for seasonal dock and transient slips would continue to increase and economic development opportunities associated with waterfront recreation would continue to be constrained by the availability of existing slips and moorings. This alternative is required under CEQ guidance and provides the baseline for comparison of the other alternatives.

Under Alternative B (the Proposed Action), a floating dock system and wave attenuator would be constructed between the breakwater and Perkins Pier. This structure would extend approximately 780 feet from the shoreline and would provide 185 boat slips that would be protected from wind-driven waves generated along the southern fetch across Lake Champlain. The location of the marina expansion and wave attenuator and the type of materials used to construct it would limit the degree of adverse environmental impacts associated with this alternative.

Alternative C would involve the construction of a marina behind a solid-fill rock breakwater within the same area as proposed under Alternative B. However the breakwater would be similar to the existing USACE Burlington Harbor Project breakwater that was originally completed in 1890. A solid-fill breakwater would provide excellent protection from wave action and easy public access onto the structure. The construction of this alternative would involve an extended period of disturbance within Lake Champlain while material was being placed to construct the new breakwater. In addition, the portion of the lake bed within the Project Area would be permanently converted to upland and benthic habitat would be lost. In addition, aquatic organisms and long-shore currents that flow through the area would be blocked by the breakwater.

Determination

I have determined that the Environmental Assessment meets National Environmental Policy Act requirements of the Service. I find that all reasonable alternatives were considered in the evaluation of this project. Study of the effects of the proposed action on the issues considered has shown that the proposed action will not have a negative impact on the quality of the human environment. Comments were received in response to the Environmental Assessment, but only editorial changes were made in response to the comments. Comments received and responses are found in Appendix B of the EA. Based

on a review and evaluation of the Environmental Assessment, I have determined that construction of the Perkins Pier Marina Facility proposed for funding in part under Grant F16AP00027 is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. The environmental assessment prepared by the City of Burlington has been adopted by the USFWS.



Colleen Sculley
Chief, Division of Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration

8/23/16

Date

References:

Project Narrative Tier II BIG Application for Perkins Pier Marina
Perkins Pier Environmental Assessment – Final