

Willamette River Dredged Material Management Plan Project

The purpose of the Willamette River Dredged Material Management Plan (DMMP) is to develop a long-term maintenance plan for the Willamette River federal navigation channel. The federal navigation channel extends from the mouth of the Willamette River upstream 11.6 miles to the Broadway Bridge. The width of the channel varies between 600 and 1,900 feet and the maintained depth is 40 feet. The Portland District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers maintains the federal navigation channel. The current depth and length of the Willamette River federal navigation channel was authorized by the 1962 Omnibus Bill for Rivers and Harbors, Public Law 87-874, October 23, 1962.

It is Corps policy to develop dredged material management plans for all Corps navigation projects that do not have at least 20 years of dredged material placement capacity. The Willamette River DMMP will address maintenance of the authorized federal navigation channel for the next 20 years. The channel typically required maintenance dredging every three to five years to maintain adequate depth and width. The channel was last dredged in 1997. Maintenance dredging has been suspended until legal and technical issues are resolved regarding dredging within the boundaries of the Portland Harbor Superfund site. The lack of maintenance dredging over the past nine years has resulted in significant shoaling of the channel. Many areas of the channel are now less than 40 feet deep, which is a significant navigation hazard to large cargo ships that require a minimum draft of 40 feet.

The federal navigation channel is critical to the success of the Portland harbor and the regional economy. Portland harbor is Oregon's primary seaport and the region's largest heavy industrial area. Each of the 34,300 industrial jobs in the harbor area supports nearly two additional jobs in the region. With this "multiplier" effect, harbor area industries generated about 100,000 jobs—one in every eight jobs in the Portland metropolitan area—and an annual payroll of \$3.5 billion in 2000 (Portland Bureau of Planning).

The Corps, in conjunction with the Lower Willamette Group, has collected and analyzed a large number of sediment samples within and adjacent to the federal navigation channel. This information will be used to characterize channel sediments for planning purposes. In addition, the Corps has done hydrographic surveys of the river and met with the Columbia River Pilots and terminal owners to establish safety needs for ships transiting the channel and accessing the terminals. All of this information will be used to predict the quantity and quality of dredged material over the next 20 years. The Corps typically dredges to maintain the channel, but other methods of channel maintenance will also be examined in the study.

The DMMP will be the plan that meets Portland Harbor economic needs and provides safe passage for cargo ships by maintaining the federal navigation channel in the least costly manner that is consistent with sound engineering practices and meets all federal environmental standards. The DMMP process will also include an economic assessment to verify that continued channel maintenance remains economically warranted; hydraulics and hydrology studies to determine sediment trends and volumes; sediment characterization studies; and will specify safe and cost-effective dredging technologies to be used. Potential disposal sites (upland, in-water, and beneficial uses) will also be evaluated.

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be developed for the DMMP in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The EIS will undergo public and agency review and comment as part of the NEPA process. If dredging is included in the preferred alternative, a water quality certificate will be obtained from the State of Oregon to allow dredging under the Clean Water Act. Endangered Species Act consultation will be done with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for listed species under their jurisdictions. An Essential Fish Habitat evaluation will be provided to NMFS and a Section 404(b)(1) evaluation will be prepared by the Corps to address the impact of any dredge material placed in “waters of the U.S.”. The DMMP will also comply with requirements of the National Historic Preservation Act. The EIS will also address the process for determining whether and how dredging may resume within the boundaries of the Superfund study area.

The Corps will prepare the DMMP and EIS. The Port of Portland is the local project sponsor. As the local sponsor, the Port of Portland is responsible for providing, without cost to the U.S. government, all lands, easements, and rights-of-way required for maintenance of the project, which includes disposal sites.

Key to development of the DMMP will be coordination and consultation with federal, state and local agencies, Native American Tribes, and interested parties. A multi-agency environmental coordination team has been formed to share information and address regulatory issues. In addition to meetings with the environmental coordination team, regularly scheduled meetings will be held with the Environmental Protection Agency, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, and Lower Willamette Group to discuss development of the DMMP as it relates to the Portland Harbor Superfund Site clean up.

Questions?

Contact:

Don Erickson, P.E.

Project Manager

Portland District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Telephone: 503-808-4713

Email: donald.l.erickson@usace.army.mil