



REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF:

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
WILMINGTON DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS
69 DARLINGTON AVENUE
WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA 28403-1343

July 5, 2012

Environmental Resources Section

Dear Sir or Madam:

The Wilmington Harbor project is a 42- to 44-foot-deep draft port located in the Cape Fear River near Wilmington on the southeastern coast of North Carolina. The project requires improvements in order to address navigation inefficiencies and potential safety issues being faced by vessels currently calling on the existing Port of Wilmington. The current alignment of the entrance channel near Bald Head Island (area 1, figure 1) is subject to rapid and persistent shoaling and is problematic for navigation under typical wind and tidal conditions. The Battery Island navigation channel turn (area 2, figure 1) is problematic for some container vessels under certain conditions of wind and tide. The current anchorage/turning basin (area 3, figure 1) dimensions are not adequate to properly accommodate the turning of some of the larger container vessels currently calling at the port. None of the improvements in these areas would involve any deepening beyond the currently authorized depths.

Alternatives to address these problems will be evaluated during a cost-shared feasibility study. This detailed evaluation would include examining multiple channel alignments and basin widths in order to address the issues defined above. The State of North Carolina supports this project and signed a Feasibility Cost Sharing Agreement on April 25, 2012, to participate in the cost-shared feasibility study.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, the study will involve the preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) depending on the environmental impacts of the potential project. This letter initiates the NEPA scoping process requesting comments from agencies, interest groups, and the public to identify significant resources and issues of concern. Comments received as a result of this scoping letter will be considered during preparation of the NEPA document.

Significant resources known to occur in the study area include fisheries resources, threatened and endangered species, terrestrial resources, human resources (including socioeconomic, recreational and aesthetic resources), and cultural resources. Potential impacts on these resources, as well as water quality, floodplains, air quality, wetlands, water supply, shore processes, potential hazardous and toxic waste (HTW) sites, and safety in the project area will be addressed in the NEPA document. Should there be other issues which you believe should be discussed, please take this opportunity to bring them to our attention.

A scoping meeting will be held on Tuesday, August 7, 2012, at the Coastline Convention Center, Room D, Wilmington, North Carolina, from 4:00 to 6:00 pm. See the following link for a location map: <http://www.coastlineconventioncenter.com/directions.asp>. Oral (limited to 5 minutes per person) and written comments will be received at that meeting. In addition, comments can be mailed to the address located at the top of the previous page to the attention of Mr. Frank Yelverton. Responses to this scoping letter may result in coordination with individuals or agencies on an as-needed basis to discuss or clarify certain issues.

In order to effectively address any concerns that are raised, we request that you submit your written comments no later than August 17, 2012. Should you have any questions regarding the project, please contact Mr. Frank Yelverton, Environmental Resources Section, at (910) 251-4640, email frank.yelverton@usace.army.mil, or send an email to our Public Affairs Office at SAWEB-PAO@usace.army.mil.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elden Gatwood". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elden Gatwood
Chief, Planning and Environmental Branch

Enclosure



**US Army Corps
of Engineers**
Wilmington District

Wilmington Harbor Navigation Improvements Feasibility Study



The US Army Corps of Engineers, Wilmington District, in partnership with the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources, will soon be initiating the Wilmington Harbor Navigation Improvements feasibility study. The purpose of the feasibility study is to examine the potential for making improvements to three areas of the existing channel that are posing problems and creating inefficiencies for ships currently calling on the Port of Wilmington.

These three areas are 1) Entrance channel near Bald Head Island, 2) Battery Island Turn, and 3) Anchorage (Turning) Basin.

The feasibility study and report will examine all relevant economic, environmental, and social benefits and costs related to any proposed improvements.



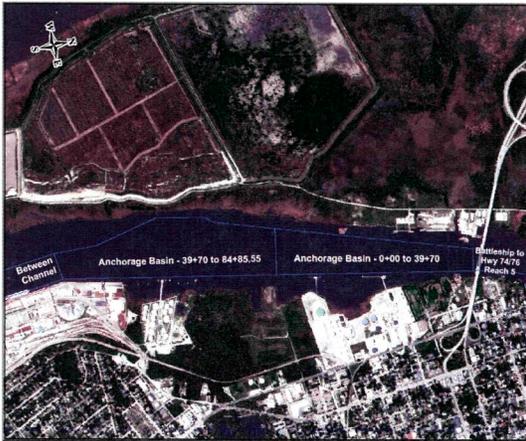
1 Entrance Channel Near Bald Head Island

Shoaling on the east side of the navigation channel near Bald Head Island has reduced the channel width and made navigation more difficult in this area. The feasibility study will look at alternatives for re-aligning the channel in this area. Potential benefits include decreased ship transit time, increased ship safety, and reduced future dredging costs.



2 Battery Island Turn

Navigation of the turn at Battery Island is problematic for certain vessels under specific wind and tide conditions. The feasibility study will look at alternatives for widening or realigning the channel in this area. Potential benefits include decreased ship transit time and increased ship safety.



3 Anchorage (Turning) Basin

The current anchorage basin dimensions are inadequate for properly accommodating turning of some of the larger container vessels calling on the Port. The feasibility study will look at alternatives for widening the anchorage basin. Potential benefits include decreased ship transit time.

The product of the feasibility study will be an integrated USACE Feasibility Report and NEPA document, which will contain recommendations to Congress. There will be various opportunities during the course of the study for the public to formally provide input and comments on the study.



Figure 1. Wilmington Harbor Navigation Improvements Feasibility Study