



**US Army Corps
of Engineers**
Wilmington District

PUBLIC NOTICE

Issue Date: September 22, 2016
Comment Deadline: October 21, 2016
Corps Action ID #: SAW-2013-01883
STIP Project Nos. I-4400 & I-4700

The Wilmington District, Corps of Engineers (Corps) has received an application from the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) regarding a potential future requirement for Department of the Army (DA) authorization to discharge dredged or fill material into waters of the United States associated with the proposed widening and improvement of 22.2 miles of Interstate 26 (I-26) in Henderson and Buncombe Counties, North Carolina, State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) Nos. I-4400 and I-4700.

Specific alignment alternatives and location information are described below and shown on the attached maps. This Public Notice and attachments are also available on the Wilmington District Web Site at <http://www.saw.usace.army.mil/Missions/Regulatory-Permit-Program/Public-Notices/>

The Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and related maps for this project are available on the NCDOT website at <https://www.ncdot.gov/projects/i26Widening/>

Applicant: North Carolina Department of Transportation
Project Development and Environmental Analysis Branch
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Authority

The Corps will evaluate this application to compare alternatives that have been carried forward for detailed study pursuant to applicable procedures of Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1344).

In order to more fully integrate Section 10 and Section 404 permit requirements with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, and to give careful consideration to our required public interest review and 404(b)(1) compliance determination, the Corps is soliciting public comment on the merits of this proposal and on the alternatives evaluated in the August 2016, FHWA DEIS (<https://www.ncdot.gov/projects/i26Widening/>). At the close of this comment period, the District Commander will evaluate and consider the comments received, as well as the expected adverse and beneficial effects of the proposed

road construction, to select the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative (LEDPA). The District Commander is not authorizing construction of the proposed project at this time. A final DA permit may be issued only after our review process is complete, impacts to the aquatic environment have been minimized to the maximum extent practicable, and a compensatory mitigation plan for unavoidable impacts has been approved.

Location

The project is located in western North Carolina in southeastern Henderson County, just south of Hendersonville, and continues west to southern Buncombe County, just south of Asheville. The project corridor is 22.2 miles in length and passes through the Town of Fletcher and the City of Hendersonville in Henderson County, and the southern portion of the City of Asheville in Buncombe County (Attachment 1).

This project is included in the 2016 – 2025 STIP as two projects, I-4400 and I-4700. STIP Project I-4400 is 13.6 miles in length and begins at US 25 (Exit 54) near Hendersonville and extends along I-26 west to NC 280 (Exit 40). STIP Project I-4700 is 8.6 miles in length and extends along I-26 from NC 280 west to the I-40/I-240 interchange. For the remainder of this public notice, STIP Numbers I-4400 and I-4700 will be referred to as “the project.”

I-26 is a major transportation route in western North Carolina and the southeastern United States for the movement of both people and goods. I-26, as a whole, is considered a west-to-east corridor and runs from Kingsport, Tennessee to Charleston, South Carolina. As noted in the DEIS however, I-26 generally runs south-to-north in the project area.

The project study area (PSA) boundary for this project generally consists of a 1,400-foot wide corridor that follows existing I-26 from US 25 in Henderson County, north to I-40/I-240 in Buncombe County (Attachments 2-11). The PSA boundary also encompasses interchanges that are included in this project and the Blue Ridge Parkway Bridge over I-26.

Existing Site Conditions

I-26 is a four-lane, median-divided, full control-of-access facility between US 25 (Exit 54) in Henderson County and I-40/I-240 (Exit 31) in Buncombe County. This section of I-26 also carries the US 74 designation. The project area includes eleven existing grade-separated crossings and eight existing interchanges. The speed limit varies from 65 miles per hour (mph) in southern Henderson County to 60 mph in northern Henderson County, into Buncombe County, and up to I-40/I-240.

I-26 interchanges with US 25, which serves the region as a north-south connection between Asheville, North Carolina and Greenville, South Carolina, and US 64, which serves the region as an east-west connection between I-77 in Statesville, NC, and I-75

near Chattanooga, Tennessee. The interchange of I-26 and I-40/I-240 in Buncombe County forms the center of the region’s transportation system. These two freeways interconnect the region and carry the highest percentage of trips passing through the area, while their locations in proximity to populated areas, commercial areas, and the Asheville Regional Airport also serve a large portion of the local travel demands.

Due to its predominately south to north alignment in the PSA, I-26 serves south to north traffic through the region. With limited alternate south to north routes, automobile and truck-freight through traffic utilizing I-26 share the facility with local traffic, creating several areas of congestion during peak travel periods on I-26. The I-26 corridor in the PSA also experiences a seasonal increase in traffic volume during the summer and fall months as tourists visit the region for recreational activities and fall foliage viewing.

Current traffic volumes indicate that demand exceeds the available capacity of I-26 in Buncombe County (NC 280 [Airport Road] to I-40/I-240), with this segment of the roadway operating at Level of Service (LOS) F. LOS is a qualitative measure used to describe the operating conditions of a roadway. LOS is generally described in terms of factors such as speed, travel time, freedom to maneuver, traffic interruptions, driver comfort and convenience, and safety. LOS is represented by a letter ranking from “A” to “F”, with “A” representing free flowing conditions and ”F” representing traffic-breakdown conditions. Below is a visual representation of LOS from the August 2016 FHWA DEIS:

LEVEL OF SERVICE	DESCRIPTION
A	Free-flow traffic operations 
B	Reasonable free-flow traffic operations 
C	At or near free-flow 
D	Decreasing free-flow levels 
E	Traffic operations at capacity 
F	Breakdown in vehicular flow 

The segment in Henderson County (US 25 to NC 280) is currently operating at an acceptable LOS D or better. Taking regional population and employment growth into account, the entire roadway corridor from US 25 to I-40/I-240 is projected to operate over capacity (LOS F) in 2040. According to NCDOT, I-26 currently carries substantial traffic volumes and is projected to carry higher traffic volumes in the future; therefore, the number of congestion-related crashes is expected to increase. The approximately 23-mile section of I-26 from the US 25 interchange in Henderson County to the

I-40/I-240 interchange in Buncombe County experienced 2,072 crashes during the five-year time period of March 2011 through February 2016. This crash rate is below the statewide average for similar facility types, when considering total and non-fatal injury crash type categories, but above the statewide average for the fatal crash category. Approximately 66 percent of all crashes occur during the 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. timeframe.

The Blue Ridge Parkway Bridge over I-26 is included in the PSA for this project; this bridge is located at Milepost 391.79 on the parkway. An average of 5,000 vehicles per day use this bridge during the visitor season. There is no direct access to I-26 from the parkway.

Land use throughout the PSA is mixed, consisting of large sections of residential areas, commercial and industrial stretches, and agricultural tracts. Residential areas generally consist of single family homes on individual parcels or within subdivisions. Commercial development is largely concentrated near the I-26 interchanges with US 64, NC 280 (Airport Road), NC 146 (Long Shoals Road), and NC 191 (Brevard Road).

Water resources in the PSA are part of the Broad and French Broad river basins (US Geological Survey [USGS] Hydrologic Unit Codes [HUC] 03050105 and 06010105). The French Broad River is a major feature in the region. It bisects Buncombe County and provides a water source for a large portion of the PSA. Due to the topography of the region, most other rivers, streams, and creeks flow into the French Broad River. The Hominy Creek watershed is located in southern Asheville and contains Hominy Creek and South Hominy Creek. South Hominy Creek, the French Broad River, Clear Creek, Devils Fork, Bat Fork, Ivy Creek, Mills River, Mud Creek, and Cane Creek are listed on the NCDWR 2014 Final 303(d) list of impaired waters.

One hundred and seventy-five (175) perennial and intermittent streams, one hundred and fifty-eight (158) wetlands, and fourteen (14) ponds were identified in the PSA for this project. All but three (3) of these streams are designated as cold water streams. The French Broad River in the PSA is a navigable water under Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899.

There are no designated anadromous fish waters or Primary Nursery Areas present in the PSA. There are no designated High Quality Waters, Outstanding Resource Waters, or Water Supply Watersheds (WS-I or WS-II) within 1.0 mile downstream of the PSA. The North Carolina 2014 Final 303(d) list of impaired waters (DWR, 2015) includes the French Broad River, Mud Creek, and Devils Fork; however, none of the streams in the project corridor are listed for either turbidity or sedimentation. The French Broad River (Assessment Unit [AU] 6-(54.75)b) from Mud Creek to NC 146 is listed for fecal coliform. Mud Creek (AU 6-55c2) from Clear Creek to Byers Creek is listed for Fish Community - Fair and Benthos - Fair. Devils Fork (AU 6-55-8-2b) from the first unnamed tributary west of Howard Gap Road (SR 1006) to Johnson Drainage Ditch is listed for Benthos - Poor.

Applicant's Stated Needs and Purpose

Applicant's stated needs:

- Improve existing and projected roadway capacity deficiencies.

According to NCDOT, sections of I-26 currently operate at levels of congestion characterized by unstable travel speeds with a high level of discomfort to the driver. As projected traffic volumes increase, more sections of I-26 are projected to operate at similar levels of congestion. I-26 is anticipated to operate over capacity by 2040 (design year), hindering its ability to serve high-speed regional travel.

- Improve insufficient pavement structure and deteriorating existing road surface conditions.

The existing I-26 roadway surface has undergone major rehabilitation twice, most recently in 2011. During past rehabilitation efforts, NCDOT Divisions 13 and 14 also replaced slabs and repaired joints. According to NCDOT, the roadway is again showing signs of deterioration and additional rehabilitation will not be sufficient to provide a quality roadway because of the lack of depth of remaining concrete. Reconstruction of I-26 in the PSA is needed for high-speed, safe, and efficient travel.

Applicant's stated purpose:

The purpose of the proposed improvements to I-26, from US 25 in Henderson County north to I-40/I-240 in Buncombe County, is to reduce congestion, with a goal of achieving an overall LOS D in the design year (2040), and to improve the pavement structure. LOS D is the standard performance goal target used by NCDOT for environmental studies where congestion is one of the needs being addressed.

Project Description

NCDOT proposes to widen and improve a 22.2-mile segment of I-26 from US 25 near Hendersonville to I-40/I-240 south of Asheville by addressing (1) existing and projected roadway capacity deficiencies, and (2) insufficient pavement structure and deteriorating existing road surface conditions.

Detailed Study Alternatives

The following three (3) Build Alternatives were studied in the DEIS for this project (Attachments 12-21):

- Build Alternative 1: 6-Lane Widening. The 6-Lane Alternative would widen I-26 to three lanes in each direction from US 25 to I-40/I-240.
- Build Alternative 2: 8-Lane Widening. The 8-Lane Alternative would widen I-26 to four lanes in each direction from US 25 to I-40/I-240.

- Build Alternative 3: Hybrid 6/8-Lane Widening. The Hybrid 6/8-Lane Alternative would widen I-26 to three lanes in each direction between US 25 and the US 25 (Asheville Highway) interchange and widen I-26 to four lanes in each direction from the US 25 (Asheville Highway) to the I-40/I-240 interchange.

As detailed in the FHWA DEIS for this project, although all of the Build Alternatives would reduce congestion and improve pavement structure, the 8-Lane Widening Alternative and Hybrid 6/8-Lane Widening Alternative would both achieve an overall LOS D in the design year for all freeway segments in the PSA; the 6-Lane Widening Alternative would not provide an overall LOS D.

In addition to the three Build Alternatives, a No-Build Alternative was also retained as a baseline against which the benefits, costs and impacts of the Build Alternatives could be compared. The No-Build Alternative assumed that the transportation network in the PSA will continue to develop as called for in the 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), but without the subject project included. The FHWA and NCDOT determined that the No-Build Alternative would not meet the project's purposes.

Because the columns supporting the deck of the Blue Ridge Parkway Bridge over I-26 are spaced in such a way that they do not accommodate widening of the I-26 facility under any of the three (3) Build Alternatives, NCDOT and FHWA propose to replace the bridge as part of this project. NCDOT and FHWA have coordinated with the National Park Service (NPS) in the development and evaluation of bridge replacement options. Four (4) options (Attachment 22) for realigning the parkway in conjunction with replacing the existing bridge were investigated in detail. Replacing the bridge on new alignment south of the current structure (Option 4), was identified as NPS's Preferred Option.

The US 25 (Asheville Highway) interchange with I-26 was determined to have operational issues in the design year (2040) under the No-Build Alternative. In addition, the 8-Lane Widening Alternative in the base year (2011) and the 6-Lane Widening Alternative in the design year (2040) had operational deficiencies at the southern ramp termini where lanes would be added to or dropped from the existing system at the US 25 (Asheville Highway) interchange. Four alternative interchange designs were developed and evaluated to address these issues. The partial cloverleaf design with a 231-foot loop radius was recommended for further study in combination with the three I-26 widening Build Alternatives.

Impacts to waters of the U.S. for each of the three (3) Build Alternatives that were studied in detail in the DEIS are listed below. These impact estimates were calculated based on functional slope stake limits plus 40 feet.

Table 1. Stream and Wetland Impacts by Build Alternative

(source – August 2016 FHWA DEIS)

Build Alternative	Stream Impacts* (linear feet)	Wetland Impacts* (acres)
6-Lane Widening	21,597	4.8
8-Lane Widening	27,241	8.0
Hybrid 6/8-Lane Widening	24,650	7.7

*Impacts are based on functional slope stake limits plus 40 feet.

All of the Build Alternatives would have less than 0.1 acre impact to ponds in the PSA.

Based on the information available to date, including the information contained in the Draft EIS, the FHWA and NCDOT have identified the Hybrid 6/8-Lane Widening Alternative as the Preferred Alternative. This alternative would widen I-26 to three lanes in each direction between US 25 and the US 25 (Asheville Highway) interchange and widen I-26 to four lanes in each direction from the US 25 (Asheville Highway) to the I-40/I-240 interchange. The US 25 (Asheville Highway) partial cloverleaf interchange is a component of the Preferred Alternative. Additionally, the Blue Ridge Parkway would be realigned and the bridge carrying it over I-26 would be replaced as part of this project. After the Draft EIS comment period ends, the FHWA and NCDOT will review agency and public comments received, and comments resulting from the public hearing, to reassess and/or reconfirm selection of the Preferred Alternative.

Cultural Resources

The FHWA is the lead federal agency for this project and, in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), is the federal agency responsible for making determinations and requesting concurrence with these determinations from the North Carolina Historic Preservation Office (HPO). Additionally, if and when necessary, adverse effects to historic resources will be resolved through execution of a memorandum of agreement.

Architectural Resources

Nine resources within the PSA were found to be either listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) or were considered eligible for listing. The alternatives may require right of way from some of the resources. At meetings on May 19, 2015, and April 26, 2016, representatives of the NCDOT, FHWA, and HPO reached concurrence on the effects of the proposed alternatives on these resources.

Table 2. Historic Architecture Assessment of Effects

(source – August 2016 FHWA DEIS)

Property and Status	Widening Alternative	Effect Finding	Reasons
McMurray House (Windy Hill) (HN1904) DE-Criterion C	6-Lane & Hybrid 6/8 Lane	No Adverse Effect	Access road along west side of property will be temporarily closed during construction, but does not impact access to the house.
	8-Lane	No Adverse Effect with commitments **4(f) <i>de minimis</i>	Access road along west side will be permanently closed and requires removal of a row of recently planted trees. Noise at the structure predicted to increase by 5 decibels. Access to the house will not be impacted. NCDOT will contact the property owner to discuss replanting trees and noise abatement measures such as storm windows or insulation.
Camp Orr (Camp Pinewood) (HN1905) DE-Criteria A&C	6-Lane, 8-Lane, & Hybrid 6/8 Lane	No Adverse Effect **4(f) <i>de minimis</i>	Some small sections of new right of way required on east side of interstate to accommodate cut and fill slopes and the control of access fencing will be relocated as needed in these areas. Requires some tree removal along length of property that borders interstate. Some fill impacts to wetlands adjacent to historic property, but within NCDOT existing ROW. Does not impact contributing resource.
Sholtz-Cantrell Estate (HN0059) DE-Criterion A	6-Lane, 8-Lane, & Hybrid 6/8 Lane	No Effect	No construction work within property boundary. Viewshed from house will not be impacted.
Hyder Dairy Farm (HN1906) DE-Criteria A&C	6-Lane, 8-Lane, & Hybrid 6/8 Lane	No Adverse Effect **4(f) <i>de minimis</i>	Some small sections of new ROW required on both sides of interstate to accommodate cut and fill slopes and the Control of Access fencing will be relocated as needed in these areas. Requires minimal tree removal along length of property that borders interstate. Does not impact contributing resources. Viewshed from house will not be impacted.
Mountain Sanitarium (HN1907) DE-Criteria A&C	6-Lane, 8-Lane, & Hybrid 6/8 Lane	No Effect	No construction work within property boundary.
Rugby Grange (HN0042) NR-Criteria A&C	6-Lane, 8-Lane, & Hybrid 6/8 Lane	No Effect	No construction work within property boundary. Some fill impacts to wetlands adjacent to historic property, but within NCDOT existing ROW. Viewshed from house will not be impacted.
Cureton House (HN1912) DE-Criterion C	6-Lane, 8-Lane, & Hybrid 6/8 Lane	Adverse Effect	Tree clearing adjacent to the property will constitute an adverse visual effect to the property's setting. Further, an expected 3 decibel noise increase, resulting in a 68 db(A) noise level in all build alternatives, will constitute an adverse audible effect.

Table 2. Historic Architecture Assessment of Effects

(source – August 2016 FHWA DEIS)

Property and Status	Widening Alternative	Effect Finding	Reasons
Blue Ridge Parkway (NC0001) DE-Criteria A&C	6-Lane, 8-Lane, & Hybrid 6/8 Lane	Adverse Effect **4(f)	Bridge carrying Blue Ridge Parkway over I-26 will be demolished and replaced with a new structure developed in collaboration with Eastern Federal Lands, Blue Ridge Parkway, NCDOT, NC-HPO, and FHWA.
Biltmore Estate (BN0004) NR-Criteria A,B,C,&D National Historic Landmark	6-Lane, 8-Lane, & Hybrid 6/8 Lane	No Adverse Effect **4(f) <i>de minimis</i>	Some small sections of new ROW required to accommodate cut and fill slopes and the Control of Access fencing will be relocated as needed in these areas. Requires minimal tree removal along length of property that borders interstate. Some fill impacts to wetlands adjacent to historic property, but within NCDOT existing ROW. Does not impact contributing resources.

**FHWA is using the HPO’s concurrence as a basis for a “*de minimis*” finding for the following properties, pursuant to Section 4(f):

1. McMurray House (Windy Hill) (HN1904)
2. Camp Orr (Camp Pinewood) (HN1905)
3. Hyder Dairy Farm (HN1906)
4. Biltmore Estate (BN0004)

Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966

Section 4(f) provides protection to historic properties, public parks, and recreation areas. All Build Alternatives would result in the Section 4(f) use of the Biltmore Estate, Hyder Dairy Farm, Camp Orr, Blue Ridge Parkway, and the Mountains to Sea Trail (MST). The 8-Lane Widening Alternative would also result in the Section 4(f) use of the McMurray House. Through consultation with the officials with jurisdiction it was determined that the minor use of the Biltmore Estate, Hyder Dairy Farm, Camp Orr, McMurray House and Mountains to Sea Trail would result in a *de minimis* impact. NCDOT and FHWA will continue to coordinate with the NPS regarding the Blue Ridge Parkway realignment and bridge replacement.

Archaeological Resources

In a letter dated November 18, 2014, the HPO provided concurrence that no additional archaeological survey work is required for the subject project. In a memorandum from the NPS’s Blue Ridge Parkway archaeologist, dated July 22, 2015, it is noted that a pedestrian survey of the Blue Ridge Parkway Bridge replacement Area of Potential Effect (APE) was completed by the NPS. Review of known archaeological sites from the North Carolina Office of State Archaeology (OSA) and the NPS Archaeological Site Management Information System (ASMIS) resulted in the determination that no known sites would be impacted by the proposed bridge replacement and realignment of the parkway.

Endangered Species

The FHWA is the lead federal agency for this project and is the federal agency responsible for making determinations and requesting concurrence with these determinations from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in accordance with Section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The following table contains the federally listed threatened and endangered species for Buncombe and Henderson Counties. It also includes the FHWA's determinations of effect to these species that would result from implementation of the Build Alternatives.

Table 3. Federally-listed Threatened and Endangered Species in Henderson and Buncombe Counties

(source – August 2016 FHWA DEIS)

Scientific Name	Common Name	Federal Status	Habitat Present	County	Biological Conclusion
<i>Alasmidonta raveneliana</i>	Appalachian elktoe ¹	E	Yes	Buncombe ¹ and Henderson	No Effect
<i>Epioblasma florentina walkeri</i> (= <i>E. walker</i>)	Tan riffleshell ¹	E	Yes	Buncombe	No Effect
<i>Erimonax monachus</i>	Spotfin chub (=turquoise shiner) ¹	T	No	Buncombe ¹	No Effect
<i>Geum radiatum</i>	Spreading avens	E	No	Buncombe	No Effect
<i>Glaucomys sabrinus coloratus</i>	Carolina northern flying squirrel	E	No	Buncombe and Henderson	No Effect
<i>Glyptemys muhlenbergii</i>	Bog Turtle	T(S/A)	Yes	Buncombe and Henderson	Not Required ²
<i>Gymnoderma lineare</i>	Rock gnome lichen	E	No	Buncombe	No Effect
<i>Helonias bullata</i>	Swamp pink	T	Yes	Henderson	No Effect
<i>Isotria medeoloides</i>	Small whorled pogonia	T	Yes	Henderson	No Effect
<i>Microhexura montivaga</i>	Spruce fir moss spider	E	No	Buncombe	No Effect
<i>Myotis grisescens</i>	Gray bat	E	Yes	Buncombe	No Effect
<i>Myotis septentrionalis</i>	Northern long-eared bat	T	Yes	Buncombe and Henderson	May Affect Not Likely to Adversely Affect
<i>Sagittaria fasciculata</i>	Bunched arrowhead ¹	E	Yes	Henderson	No Effect
<i>Sarracenia rubra ssp. jonesii</i>	Mountain sweet pitcher plant ¹	E	Yes	Henderson	No Effect
<i>Sisyrinchium dichotomum</i>	White irisette	E	Yes	Henderson	No Effect

Table 3. Federally-listed Threatened and Endangered Species in Henderson and Buncombe Counties

(source – August 2016 FHWA DEIS)

Scientific Name	Common Name	Federal Status	Habitat Present	County	Biological Conclusion
<i>Spirea virginiana</i>	Virginia spiraea ¹	T	Yes	Buncombe ¹	No Effect

E – Endangered

T – Threatened

T(S/A) – Threatened due to similarity of appearance

¹Historic record (the species was last observed in the county more than 50 years ago)

²Species listed as T(S/A) are not biologically endangered or threatened and are not subject to Section 7 consultation and therefore no Biological Conclusion is required.

Evaluation

The decision whether to issue a permit will be based on an evaluation of the probable impacts, including cumulative impacts, of the proposed activity on the public interest. That decision will reflect the national concern for both protection and utilization of important resources. The benefit which reasonably may be expected to accrue from the proposal must be balanced against its reasonably foreseeable detriments. All factors which may be relevant to the proposal will be considered including the cumulative effects thereof; among those are conservation, economics, aesthetics, general environmental concerns, wetlands, historic properties, fish and wildlife values, flood hazards, flood plain values (in accordance with Executive Order 11988), land use, navigation, shoreline erosion and accretion, recreation, water supply and conservation, water quality, energy needs, safety, food and fiber production, mineral needs, considerations of property ownership, and, in general, the needs and welfare of the people. For activities involving the discharge of dredged or fill materials in waters of the United States, the evaluation of the impact of the activity on the public interest will include application of the Environmental Protection Agency’s 404(b)(1) guidelines.

Compensatory Mitigation

The purpose of compensatory mitigation is to offset unavoidable functional losses to the aquatic environment resulting from project impacts to waters of the U.S. According to the applicant, NCDOT has attempted to avoid impacts to streams and wetlands during development of the preliminary functional designs for the Build Alternatives. This included developing alignments and interchange configurations for the Build Alternatives that avoided these resources as much as possible, while also minimizing impacts to other resources. NCDOT has also tried to minimize the total impacts to these resources by considering bridges instead of culverts over some of the larger streams and bridges over some of the larger and high quality wetlands. NCDOT will continue to seek ways to avoid and minimize impacts in further design efforts of the selected alternative and will investigate potential on-site stream and wetland mitigation opportunities for the selected

alternative. If on-site mitigation is not feasible, mitigation will be provided by the North Carolina Division of Mitigation Services (NCDMS, formerly known as the Ecosystem Enhancement Program or EEP).

Commenting Information

The Corps of Engineers is soliciting comments from the public; federal, state and local agencies and officials, including any consolidated State Viewpoint or written position of the Governor; Indian Tribes and other interested parties in order to consider and evaluate the impacts of this proposed activity. Any comments received will be considered by the Corps of Engineers to select the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative (LEDPA) for this proposal. To make this decision, comments are used to assess impacts on endangered species, historic properties, water quality, general environmental effects and the other public interest factors listed above. Comments are used in the preparation of a Corps of Engineers Environmental Assessment (EA) and/or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Comments are also used to determine the need for a public hearing and to determine the overall public interest of the proposed activity.

NCDOT will hold a public hearing on this project on Thursday, October 13, beginning with an open house from 4:00 to 6:30 p.m., followed by a formal presentation at 7:00 p.m. at the Biltmore Baptist Church, 35 Clayton Road in Arden, Buncombe County. The purpose of this hearing is to provide information about the project and receive public input. Interested individuals may attend the pre-hearing open house at any time during the above hours.

NCDOT representatives will display maps and be available to answer questions and receive comments. Written comments can be submitted at the meeting or later by November 14, 2016. The formal presentation at 7:00 pm will include an explanation of the location and design of each widening alternative, the state-federal funding relationship and right of way procedures. The presentation and comments received will be recorded and included in the alternative selection and design process. The Corps will receive a summary of the public comments.

Written comments pertinent to the proposed work will be received by the Corps of Engineers, Wilmington District, until 5pm, October 21, 2016. Written comments should be submitted to Ms. Lori Beckwith, US Army Corps of Engineers, Asheville Regulatory Field Office, 151 Patton Avenue, Room 208, Asheville, NC 28801-5006, telephone 828-271-7980. Written comments can also be submitted by email to loretta.a.beckwith@usace.army.mil