

Stakeholders Evaluation Group Final Report - DRAFT

The Stakeholders Evaluation Group (SEG) for the proposed deepening of the Savannah River harbor was created by congressional mandate as part of the conditional authorization of the project under section 101(b)(10) of WRDA 1999 (*see Appendix A*). The SEG was tasked by Congress to identify all predicted and potential environmental impacts, identify studies to address impacts and reach consensus on a mitigation plan to fully and adequately address impacts.

The SEG encountered some difficulty at first in defining its nature including membership, mutually agreed upon definition of “consensus” and establishing and maintaining a public record of the proceedings. The adoption of an independent facilitator and a court reporter after the first few meetings assisted in this effort. The group eventually adopted the “SEG Operating Guidelines” (*see Appendix B*) defining the group’s mission, operating principals and tasks to be completed. The membership of the group has remained open, a practice which over time has resulted in a fairly stable body including a broad representation of community, commercial and environmental interests, and federal and state agency representatives (*see Appendix C*). The effort to keep a public record of the group’s proceedings has expanded beyond the use of the court reporter to include a website with links to items including meeting transcripts, committee reports, presentation materials and supporting documentation.

Congress saw “the SEG’s early and consistent involvement in the project is an integral and essential component of the project” (*see highlight in Appendix A*). This involvement has benefited the proposed project as follows:

- Allowed the project sponsor to reach stakeholders in a more organized fashion and address problems constructively
- Created a sense of community and fostered working relationships with disparate parties
- Encouraged inquiry and full vetting of issues
- Enabled the education of diverse stakeholders of the scientific studies and body of knowledge gained, Corp principals/guidelines and federal regulations providing for more informed public comments for this and other Savannah River related projects
- Enabled the Corp and project sponsor to receive and merge into the project more timely input and feedback along the way rather than and hopefully avoiding having to fix problems at the end of the process.

- Incorporate independent peer review which the Corp agreed to use for three project issues/studies – the modeling, economics and aquifer.
- Inclusion of eleven additional SEG-identified studies (*see Appendix D*) all of which were funded by the project sponsor and the Corp

The SEG process has not been trouble free over its 8 year and 4 month existence. A significant challenge grappled with and not entirely resolved has been how to incorporate a stakeholders group in the existing Corp and agency processes. Another dilemma unresolved is the future of the SEG after conclusion of the studies and consensus on a mitigation plan. Is there a way to make the group self-sustaining for continued involvement in future harbor related projects/issues? And how and where does the SEG find a repository for the meeting records and information gathered through the SEG process after its conclusion?

DRAFT

Suggested Appendices

- A. WRDA 1999 Section 101(b)(10) Savannah Harbor Expansion Excerpt
- B. Operating Guidelines
- C. SEG Participants (list)
- D. SEG Recommended Studies (list)
- E. Consensus Mitigation Plan
- F. Report from Interested SEG Committees

DRAFT