

# **ROLE OF THE STAKEHOLDERS EVALUATION GROUP IN REVIEW OF THE SAVANNAH HARBOR EXPANSION PROJECT**

## **PURPOSE OF THE SEG**

The Stakeholders Evaluation Group (SEG) was formed to provide a public forum and assist the Georgia Ports Authority (GPA) to develop scientific studies and analyses necessary to identify impacts on specific environmental concerns that may result from proposed deepening of the harbor channel. The SEG process has as its principal deliverables consensus amongst the participants regarding:

- the scope and content of the scientific investigations and analyses to be performed pursuant to the development of a Tier II Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
- the impacts of the project and the resulting appropriate mitigation actions

The group operates to reach consensus decisions. Members may submit minority views, contrary to the consensus, that will be included along with a description of the group's consensus decision.

## **TRADITIONAL CORPS PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS**

The US Army Corps of Engineers includes public involvement in all of its water resource feasibility studies. The extent of that involvement varies by project, but the National Environmental Policy Act requires consideration of public views before the federal decision-maker makes the final decision on the proposed action.

The normal process is to include the public at the beginning of the study in the scoping of the project issues. The public's views are sought to identify the issues that may be important on that particular study. This was accomplished through the scoping meetings held by GPA in 2000 and by the Corps in 2002.

During the course of a study, the Corps may provide status reports to the public or share the results of specific investigations, in which members of the public have shown interest. In this project, this has been accomplished by the Corps through several methods, including the following:

- Articles published in the Corps' monthly *Castle* magazine
- Information brochure published in 2003
- Presentation to local professional groups in 2004
- Release for public comment the Formulation of Alternatives Report in 2004
- Presentations at Georgia Water Resources Conference in 2005
- Corps' presentations to the SEG
- District website on the project

GPA has also provided information to the public on this project by several means, including the following:

- Articles published in GPA's monthly *AnchorAge* magazine
- Presentations to local civic groups
- GPA participation in the SEG
- GPA website on the project which contains:
  - Project status
  - Reference information
  - SEG meeting and committee records
  - Publication of completed technical analysis and scientific study reports

The Draft Feasibility Report and Environmental Document are typically sent out to the public for review and comment. The Draft documents explain the evaluations the agency has conducted into the problem and, typically, identifies a tentatively recommended course of action. The Corps considers the comments it receives from the perspective of whether the additional information or perspective provided by the comment would alter the recommended course of action for the project. A public meeting may be held during the comment period if the proposed action would affect a large number of individuals or the action is controversial.

A Final Environmental Impact Statement is sent out for a second public review. Under some circumstances, a Final Feasibility Report may also be sent out for a second review. At that point, the public can see what action the agency intends to recommend concerning the project. Again, the Corps considers the comments it receives from the perspective of whether the additional information or perspective should alter the recommended course of action for the project. A Final EIS generally contains a section with the comments that the agency received on the Draft document and how the agency incorporated the information or perspective contained in the comment.

## **FUTURE ROLES OF SEG**

The SEG will continue to meet regularly as it has to receive information on study progress and briefings on completed technical products. GPA and the Corps intend to continue to share technical information that develops from the ongoing studies as it becomes available.

The Corps plans to conduct a **Public Information Meeting** after completion of the impact evaluation modeling. The Corps will present and explain the results of the modeling. This will show what the modeling indicates would be the impacts of the channel deepening alternatives if no mitigation is included. The information will still be preliminary at that time, but will be what the technical analyses appear to indicate at that time. The Corps will also solicit comments on the impacts that have been identified and ideas on potential mitigation actions that it should consider to minimize or compensate for the impacts that are identified.

The Corps plans to conduct a second **Public Information Meeting** after it completes the modeling work on the mitigation plan. The Corps will present and explain the results of the modeling. This will show what the modeling indicates would be the impacts of the channel deepening alternatives when mitigation is included. The information will still be preliminary at that time, but will be what the technical analyses appear to indicate at that time. The Corps will also solicit comments on the adequacy of the proposed mitigation actions.

The Corps will make the **Draft General Reevaluation Report/Environmental Impact Statement** available for review and comment by the public. During the public review period the Corps will present and explain to the SEG the tentatively recommended plan and its mitigation features. The SEG, as a group, is to provide a consensus mitigation plan to GPA that could be used for developing the Final EIS. Individual members of the SEG may provide separate comments on the Draft GRR/EIS to the Corps through their agencies or as members of the public. The Corps will consider the views the comments we receive as we prepare the Final General Reevaluation Report/Environmental Impact Statement.

The Corps will make the **Final General Reevaluation Report/Environmental Impact Statement** available for review and comment by the public. At that time, the public will have another opportunity to provide comments on the proposed decision.

CESAM-PD-E  
23 February 06