



US Army Corps
of Engineers ®
New England District



U.S. Environmental Protection
Agency, Region I

Fact Sheet

Rhode Island Region Long-Term Dredged Material Disposal Site Evaluation Project

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Current Status:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, New England Region (EPA) in cooperation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New England District (Corps) released a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Rhode Island Region Long-Term Dredged Material Disposal Site Evaluation Project for public review and comment. In addition to the DEIS, an Executive Summary, the Draft Site Management and Monitoring Plan (SMMP) and the Proposed Rulemaking (Rule) were also released for public review and comments.

The DEIS was prepared consistent with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act, and the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act to evaluate the potential environmental impacts associated with the designation of open-water dredged material disposal sites in the Rhode Island Region.

You also may review and/or obtain electronic copies of the notice announcing the availability of the DEIS at the EPA home page on the Federal Register Environmental Documents web page: <http://www.epa.gov/fedrgstr/>. The DEIS, SMMP and the Rule are available for review and/to obtain at the following EPA web page address: <http://www.epa.gov/region1/eco/ridredge/index.html>

Background:

At the request of the Governor of Rhode Island, EPA and the Corps evaluated the feasibility of designating one or more long-term dredged material disposal sites that could meet the future navigational needs of Rhode Island and southeastern Massachusetts. Building on the Corps efforts performed for the Providence River & Harbor Maintenance Dredging Disposal Site Selection EIS, the project team conducted a survey of 450 navigation dependent facilities in 51 communities in Rhode Island and Massachusetts to identify current and potential dredging needs and the volume of dredged material associated with those needs. The projected disposal volume needs for the Rhode Island/southeastern Massachusetts region for the next 20 years is approximately 8.8 million cubic yards. Understanding the volume and source of potential dredged material allowed for the identification of a zone of siting feasibility (ZSF). The ZSF is the area within which a dredged material disposal site could be located and meet the dredging needs identified in the survey. Factors such as ability to monitor, length of haul distance; safety, etc. are used in delineation of the ZSF.

In addition to conducting multiple field investigations of benthic, fish, lobster and shellfish for population and tissue analysis, sediment and water samples were analyzed for both physical and chemical characteristics at various locations in the ZSF. An automatic data collection platform was deployed for 60 days to collect physical oceanographic information. Information from multiple sources, such as the National Marine Fisheries Service, Rhode Island Division of Environmental Management and other historic reports and

studies, were used in conjunction with the field investigations to identify and characterize the ZSF's environmental setting. Three separate meetings were held with local fishermen to collect information on fishing practices and delineate areas within the ZSF where local knowledge indicated significant fishing activities and fish resources were located.

A working group consisting of representatives of Federal and state agencies, members of local lobster, shellfish and fishing associations, recreational and commercial boating/shipping interests, members of local universities with knowledge and expertise in environmental or navigational issues and other interested members of the public was established. The working group assisted in the identification and refinement of the factors that should be used in the initial screening efforts. Additionally, the National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Rhode Island Coastal Management Resource Council and Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management were requested and agreed to become cooperating agencies for the project evaluation and EIS development. Using a three-tiered matrix of various factors, identified in the regulations and refined by involvement of the working group, initial screening of the ZSF was made. This screening eliminated all of the ZSF from further consideration with the exception of two areas, designed by Area W and Area E. The project team determined that additional field information needed to be collected in both Area W & E to assist in the identification and evaluation of potential alternative disposal sites in the EIS. Separate presentations were made to both the cooperating agencies and the working group on the initial screening procedure and its results and the proposed field work in Area W & E. Both groups concurred with the results of the screening, the need for and scope of the additional fieldwork.

After conducting additional investigations collecting and analyzing information on bathymetry, side scan, lobster, fish, shellfish and benthic in Areas W & E, two alternative disposal sites were delineated for further evaluation in the EIS. The results of the field investigation and evaluation and the rationale for delineation of the sites, named Site W and Site E, were presented to both the working group and the cooperating agencies at separate meetings. Both sites are approximately one nautical mile square. Site W is located 15 nautical miles southeast of Pt. Judith and 17.7 nautical miles northeast of Block Island. Site E is approximately nine nautical miles south of Pt. Judith and 6-1/2 nautical miles east of Block Island.

An EIS documenting the evaluation procedure and support the designation of one or more long-term dredged material disposal sites in the Rhode Island Region was prepared and was released for public review on April 30, 2004. The EIS was written pursuant to the requirements of the Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act (MPRSA, or Ocean Dumping Act), and consistent with EPA's "Statement of Policy for Voluntary Preparation of NEPA Documents." The federal action proposed in the draft EIS is to designate Site W, which is currently being used as an active disposal site by the Corps for the Providence River & Harbor Maintenance Project. The preferred alternative and its rationale for identification were presented to the cooperating agencies, which concurred with the decision.

The agencies are soliciting and encouraging public comments on the DEIS, SMMP and the Rule during the public comment period that begins April 30, 2004 and closes on June 21, 2004 at 5:00 p.m.

After the close of the public review period for the DEIS, EPA and the Corps will review all of the comments and information submitted during the period, including during the Public Hearings, and determine what actions need to be done to address those comments. It is anticipated that a Final EIS, including a response to comments section, will be released in December 2004.

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