



PUBLIC NOTICE

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Programs and Project Management Division

Date: January 23, 2026

Comment Period Closes: February 23, 2026

PUBLIC NOTICE MAINTENANCE DREDGING OF ISLE AU HAUT THOROUGHFARE FEDERAL NAVIGATION PROJECT ISLE AU HAUT, MAINE

Interested parties are hereby notified that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), New England District, plans to perform work in the navigable waters of this District, subject to the provisions of Section 103 of the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act of 1972 (P.L. 92-532), Section 404 of the Clean Water Act of 1977 (P.L. 95-217) and subject to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (P.L. 91-190).

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the USACE is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) to evaluate potential environmental impacts for the maintenance dredging of the Isle au Haut Thoroughfare (IHT) Federal Navigation Project (FNP) channel. If the EA identifies significant impacts that cannot be mitigated to a level that is less than significant, an Environmental Impact Statement would be prepared. If no unmitigable, significant impacts are identified, then a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) would be prepared. Concurrently, preparation of a 404(b)(1) evaluation is underway pursuant to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act for discharges of dredged material into waters of the U.S.

The proposed work involves maintenance dredging of the IHT FNP in Isle au Haut, Maine, and is authorized in accordance with Title 33, Parts 335-338 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

Project Description: The project was authorized by the River & Harbor Act of March 2, 1945. The authorization was for a channel -6 ft mean lower low water (MLLW) by 75 ft wide extending approximately 1,200 linear feet (LF) through the easterly end of the waterway. The original construction took place between 1956 and 1959. The existing conditions of the channel are -6 ft MLLW by 75 ft wide and a length of 1,200 ft. Mechanical maintenance dredging was conducted once in 1979, which removed approximately 1,000 cy of mostly gravel, cobble, and boulders. The dredged material was disposed of at the Flake Island Disposal Site (FIDS), which is approximately 0.8 miles northwest of the FNP.

Purpose of Work: The purpose of this work is to remove restrictive shoaling and restore the IHT FNP to provide safe navigation conditions to all vessels. The FNP provides protected access to the island and town of Isle au Haut. IHT allows for recreational, commercial, and essential vessels such as the mail boat to safely access the island harbor. Access from the mainland is by private ferry from Stonington Harbor on Deer Island. Safety and ease of access is tied to the channel's controlling depth. The ferry and mail boat have reported tidal access issues with the controlling depth that impact their schedules. The island economy is based on small craft commercial fishing and tourism tied to the Acadia National Park portion of the island. Maintenance dredging of the project is needed to provide safe access to the harbor area at all tidal stages.

Alternatives: The preferred alternative (Proposed Action) involves maintenance dredging of approximately 3,355 cubic yards (cy) of sand, gravel and cobble from shoaled areas totaling 1.2 acres within the IHT FNP channel. The Proposed Action is to dredge to -6 ft MLLW, plus 1 ft of required advanced maintenance (-7 ft MLLW), and 1 ft of overdepth, to a maximum of -8 ft MLLW. One-time, advance maintenance was approved for the entirety of a 1200 ft long authorized channel. The dredged material will be placed at the Flake Island Disposal Site (FIDS) which is approximately 0.8 miles northwest of the FNP. Placement of this material at this location will enhance the benthic environment (Attachment 1). The dredging of material from the FNP and its disposal at FIDS may occur over a period of approximately three weeks from September 15 to April 1 in the year in which funding is available, to avoid impacts to spawning shellfish, benthic resources, Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) listed species, threatened and endangered species and interactions with mobile fishing gear. The Proposed Action will be located within the U.S. territorial sea with the furthest point of the project area being approximately six nautical miles from the territorial sea baseline.

In addition to the Proposed Action, the environmental assessment (EA) will evaluate a No Action Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, USACE would not dredge the FNP in IHT and any environmental impacts resulting from the Proposed Action would be avoided. However, this alternative would allow shoal conditions in the channel to continue and likely worsen over time. Continued shoaling would cause vessels to run aground more frequently during low tides, hampering the efficient operations of the ferry and mail boat and add increasingly dangerous situations for commercial fishing vessels, for recreational boaters, especially transients, who are unfamiliar with local conditions. These restrictions to navigation would negatively affect the Islands fishing and tourism trades and provide inadequate depths for the FNP's continued use.

Additional Information: Additional information may be obtained from Mr. Patrick McNamara, Project Manager, Civil Works/IIS Project Management Branch, Programs and Project Management Division, at the return address shown, or by email at nae-pn-nav@usace.army.mil or telephone at (978) 318-8673.

Coordination: The proposed work has been or will be coordinated with the following agencies:

Federal:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency – Region 1
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – New England Field Office
National Marine Fisheries Service – Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office
National Park Service – Acadia National Park

State:

Maine Department of Environmental Protection
Maine Department of Marine Resources
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
Maine Coastal Program

Federally Recognized Tribes:

Houlton Band of Maliseets
Mi'kmaq Nation
Narragansett Indian Tribe
Passamaquoddy Tribe, Pleasant Point
Passamaquoddy Tribe, Indian Township
Penobscot Indian Nation
Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah)

Municipal Officials:

Town of Isle au Haut, Maine

Other Information:

- a. **Local Sponsors:** Town of Isle au Haut, Maine
- b. **Endangered Species:** The USACE has determined that the Proposed Action may affect, but is not likely to adversely impact, any threatened or endangered species. The project site contains no designated critical habitats. To ensure compliance with the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (87 Stat. 844), as amended, the USACE will consult with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to confirm that the Proposed Action will not significantly affect listed species or designated critical habitats.
- c. **Cultural Resources:** The USACE has determined that no historic properties are present within the Area of Potential Effect (APE) for the Proposed Action in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act NHPA of 1966, as amended. A review of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission's Cultural and Architectural Resource Management Archive and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's historical charts indicated that no cultural resources have been previously identified within the APE. The majority of the IHT FNP has

been previously dredged and is an actively used navigational channel. The FIDS is a previously used placement area. In July 2025, USACE performed a remote sensing survey that included side scan sonar and sub bottom profiling of the APE. The survey results indicated that no structures, debris, or cultural resources are located within the APE.

USACE will consult with the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, the Houlton Band of Maliseets, the Mi'kmaq Nation, the Narragansett Indian Tribe, the Passamaquoddy Tribe - Pleasant Point, the Passamaquoddy Tribe - Indian Township, the Penobscot Indian Nation, and the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) in accordance with the NHPA. As the FNP has been previously dredged, the FIDS is a previously used placement site, and a July 2025 survey did not identify any cultural resources within the FNP, no historic properties are present within the APE. The USACE expects the ME SHPO, and the Tribes listed above to concur with this determination.

d. Essential Fish Habitat: The project site is contained within areas designated as EFH as defined by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act as amended by the Sustainable Fisheries Act of 1996 for federally managed fish species. USACE assessed the effects that the project is likely to have on EFH and determined that negative effects will be short-term and localized, and that there will be no significant impacts on the designated fisheries resources. Furthermore, the addition of sand, gravel and cobble to FIDS will enhance and benefit juvenile lobster and cod EFH and increase the area of juvenile cod HAPC. USACE is in consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service to ensure that any potential impacts will be minimized.

e. Clean Water Act: A Clean Water Act Section 404(b)(1) evaluation will be performed and a request for Section 401 Water Quality Certification will be prepared and submitted to the Maine Department of Environmental Protection.

f. Coastal Zone Management Act: The USACE assessed the effects that the project is likely to have on Maine's coastal zone and determined that they will be short-term and localized, and that there will be no significant impacts. The USACE will also request concurrence from the Maine Department of Environmental Protection and a Coastal Zone Management Consistency Determination Concurrence from the Maine Coastal Program on its determination that the Proposed Action is consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the enforceable policies of the Maine Coastal Zone Management Plan.

The USACE's Proposed Action is fully consistent with Maine's enforceable coastal policies because it restores safe navigation by removing shoaling in the federal channel and enhances fish and lobster habitat through the beneficial reuse of approximately 3,500 cubic yards of clean sand, gravel and cobble material at the FIDS. The project protects habitats by limiting impacts to localized benthic communities that are expected to recover within 18 months, avoids adverse effects on water quality by using clean, uncontaminated material and secures a 401 Water

Quality Certification, and does not affect Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, scenic rivers, or historic sites. It also promotes public access and recreational use by improving vessel access to Isle au Haut, which sustains tourism and has community value. Overall, the action aligns with state coastal management goals by balancing navigation safety, environmental protection, shoreline stability, and public benefit without introducing new hazards or development pressures.

g. Section 103 of the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act (MPRSA): USACE has determined that the project is consistent with Section 103 of the MPRSA for disposal of material in ocean waters at FIDS. The FIDS disposal site will be designated by the EPA as an open water placement site in 2026. It is located in the Gulf of Maine, about .8 miles from the IHT FNP. This site was used once in 1979 when approximately 1,000 cy of mostly gravel, cobble, and boulders was placed there using a mechanical dredge and scows. The FIDS site was evaluated prior to its designation and will be regularly monitored by the USACE Disposal Area Monitoring System (DAMOS) program to assess the environmental impacts of these cumulative disposals. The area of the FIDS has been sized to provide sufficient capacity to accommodate material dredged from IHT FNP and will remain open for the next 5 years.

The proposed transportation of this dredged material for disposing of it in ocean waters is being evaluated to determine that the proposed disposal will not unreasonably degrade or endanger human health, welfare, or amenities or the marine environment, ecological systems, or economic potentialities. In making this determination, the criteria established by the Administrator, EPA pursuant to section 102(a) of the MPRSA, will be applied. In addition, based upon an evaluation of the potential effect which the failure to utilize this ocean disposal site will have on navigation, economic and industrial development, and foreign and domestic commerce of the United States, an independent determination will be made of the need to dispose of the dredged material in ocean waters, other possible methods of disposal, and other appropriate locations.

The decision whether to perform the proposed work will be based on an evaluation of the probable impact, 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 benefits that reasonably may be expected to accrue from the proposal will be balanced against its reasonably foreseeable detriments. All factors that may be relevant to the Proposed Action will be considered. Among those factors are water quality, hydrologic setting, physical and chemical environment, biological environment, essential fish habitat, endangered species, historic and archaeological resources, air quality, socioeconomic environment, coastal barrier resources, noise and, in general, the needs and welfare of the people.

As this proposed work involves the discharge of dredged material into the Waters of the United States and the transportation of dredged material for the purpose of disposal into ocean waters, the evaluation of the impact of the activity on the public interest will include application of the guidelines promulgated by the Administrator, EPA, (40 CFR

part 230) and of the criteria established under authority of section 102(a) of the MPRSA, as amended (40 CFR parts 220 to 229).

Any person who has an interest which may be affected by the disposal of this dredged material may request a public hearing. The request must be submitted in writing to the District Engineer within the comment period of this notice and must clearly set forth the interest which may be affected and the manner in which the interest may be affected by this activity. Please bring this notice to the attention of anyone you know to be interested in this project. Comments are invited from all interested parties and should be directed to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New England District, 696 Virginia Road, Concord, MA 01742-2751, ATTN: Patrick McNamara; or emailed to nae-pn-nav@usace.army.mil within 30 days of this notice.

22 JAN 2026

DATE

Attachments



Mark J. Anderson, Jr.
Deputy District Engineer
USACE, New England District

Attachment 1

Isle au Haut Thoroughfare Federal Navigation Project and the Flake Island Disposal Site

