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Contact:
Tim Dugan, 978-318-8264
timothy.j.dugan@usace.army.mil

Corps of Engineers proposes maintenance dredging of Kennebec River Federal navigation project near Bath

CONCORD, Mass. – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New England District is proposing to perform maintenance dredging of the Kennebec River Federal navigation project this summer in Bath, Maine.

The proposed work involves maintenance dredging of two portions (and advance maintenance dredging in one of those two portions) of the authorized 27-foot deep, 500-foot wide Federal Navigation Project in the Kennebec River in the summer of 2011.

Dredging is needed to remove hazardous shoals from the channel in advance of the transit of the U.S. Navy Destroyer, the “SPRUANCE,” currently scheduled to depart the Bath Iron Works on or about Sept. 1, 2011 on its way to being commissioned. The SPRUANCE has been deemed critical to national defense and its transit from the Bath Iron Works cannot be delayed.

“We are proposing to perform maintenance dredging in the vicinity of Doubling Point, just below Bath, and at the mouth of the river near Popham Beach,” said Project Manager Bill Kavanaugh, of the Corps’ New England District, Programs/Project Management Division. “We estimate that a total of about 70,000 cubic yards of clean sandy material needs to be removed from the channel.” About 50,000 cubic yards would be from Doubling Point and 20,000 cubic yards from Popham Beach.

The shoals, especially in the Doubling Point area, consist of massive sand-waves oscillating within vertical and horizontal ranges. The elevation at the tips of these sand-waves vary from –19.7 feet to –26.8 feet below Mean Lower Low Water. As part of this proposal, advance maintenance dredging may be performed to remove the sand-waves in the vicinity of Doubling Point to a maximum elevation of –32 feet in an effort to improve the chance that adequate depths will endure.

The proposed work will be performed with a hopper dredge over a three-to-five week period beginning on or about Aug. 1, 2011. The material dredged from the Doubling Point area will be disposed of at the previously used in-river disposal site located north of Bluff Head in about 95 to 100 feet of water. Material dredged from the Popham Beach area will be disposed of at a previously used 500-yard circular near-shore disposal site located about 0.4 nautical miles south of Jackknife Ledge in depths of about 40 to 50 feet.

Maintenance dredging of the Doubling Point and Popham Beach areas was last performed in 2003 when approximately 22,000 cubic yards of material were removed and disposed of at these disposal sites.

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The proposed work is contingent upon the availability of the necessary approvals and funding. An Environmental Assessment of the proposed maintenance dredging of the Kennebec River is being prepared.

The Corps has assessed the effects that dredging and disposal of dredged material are likely to have on Essential Fish Habitat and has determined that effects will be short-term and localized and that there will be no significant impacts on the designated fisheries resources. The Corps is consulting with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to assure that all impacts will be minimized to the maximum extent practicable. The Corps is also in consultation with NMFS on issues under the Endangered Species Act.

The proposed project is being coordinated with the following Federal, state and local agencies: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the National Marine Fisheries Service, the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, the Maine State Planning Office, the Maine Department of Transportation, and the Maine Historic Preservation Office.

The public notice for this proposed work, with more detailed information, is available for review on the Corps website at <http://www.nae.usace.army.mil>. Select "navigation" and then "public notices" or go directly to the link at: <http://www.nae.usace.army.mil/navigation/pubnot2.asp>.

Public comments on this proposed work should be forwarded no later than March 30, 2011 to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New England District, Programs/Project Management Division (ATTN: Mr. Bill Kavanaugh), 696 Virginia Road, Concord, MA 01742-2751 or by email to nae-pn-nav@usace.army.mil.

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