

**Department of Defense**

**Department of the Navy**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF PIER 5000 SOUTH SIDE INNER BERTH EXPANSION DREDGING PROJECT AT NAVAL BASE POINT LOMA, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA**

Pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] Sections 1500-1508) and Navy instructions for implementing NEPA regulations (32 CFR Part 775), and Chief of Naval Operations Environmental Readiness Program Manual 5090.1E, the United States Department of the Navy (Navy) gives notice that an Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required for the Pier 5000 South Side Inner Berth Expansion Dredging Project at Naval Base Point Loma (NPBL), San Diego, California.

The Draft EA was released for public review on 24 May 2021 online at:  
<https://www.cnmc.navy.mil/navysouthwestprojects>

The Draft EA was not made available in-print at public libraries due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic which limits in-person services and prevents the public from viewing the document at these locations. However, a public notice of availability for the draft EA was advertised in the San Diego Union Tribune, the draft EA was uploaded to the Navy Region Southwest website, and hardcopies were available upon request.

The 15-day public comment period ended on 7 June 2021 and no public comments were received. A Notice of Availability of the Final EA and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) will be published in the San Diego Union Tribune, and the EA and FONSI will be available for public review on the Navy Region Southwest website and by request at a project specific Navy e-mail address.

**Proposed Action:** The purpose and need for the Proposed Action is to ensure NBPL's capability to berth all classes of submarines in the Pacific Fleet which require an operational depth of -36.6 feet mean lower low water (MLLW) pursuant to Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) Memo 3120 39T236/088. The Proposed Action involves the dredging of sediment within a 0.44-acre footprint along the Pier 5000 South Side Inner (SSI) berth expansion area followed by off-site sediment disposal.

Depths within the dredge footprint currently vary from approximately -28 and -34 feet MLLW and require additional dredging to reach the design depth of -36.6 ft MLLW. Including an overdredge allowance of -2 feet, the approximate total dredge volume of the Proposed Action is 6,365 cubic yards (cy).

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Dredging would be conducted over approximately 10 days and would be accomplished using a barge-mounted clamshell or backhoe dredge. The Proposed Action includes unconfined aquatic disposal of the dredged sediment at the LA-5 Ocean Dredged Material Disposal Site (ODMDS).

**Existing Conditions:** The approximately 0.44-acre (19,050-square-foot [sq ft]) project site is located at NBPL in San Diego, California. NBPL is on the west side of San Diego Bay (Bay), near the mouth of the Bay directly opposite Naval Air Station North Island. NBPL is bordered to the north by the communities of La Playa and Sunset Cliffs, to the south and west by the Pacific Ocean, and to the east by the San Diego Bay.

Two federally listed threatened or endangered species have the potential to occur in the general area of the project site, the California least tern (*Sterna antillarum browni*) and the green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*). To reduce potential impacts to these species, project dredging activities will not occur during designated California least tern nesting season (1 April to 15 September). Instead, dredging would occur during colder winter months, when both California least terns and green sea turtles are not likely to be present in the project area. Green sea turtle monitoring would be performed during all dredging activities to ensure that activities cease if a turtle is observed in the project site.

Although all of the Bay is designated as Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, project implementation would result in no adverse effects on EFH given the short duration of the proposed dredging and the ability of fish to temporarily leave the project area during dredging and then return to the area after dredging completion.

**Alternatives Analyzed:** The EA analyzed dredging over a reduced 0.32-acre (13,970 sq ft) footprint as compared to the 0.44-acre (19,050 sq ft) the Proposed Action. The reduced dredging footprint alternative would provide limited maneuverability and access capacity for large submarines at Pier 5000 relative to the Proposed Action while still meeting the purpose and need for the project.

Available dredge material disposal options were analyzed in the EA including dredge material disposal at the LA-5 ODMDS (Preferred Alternative), the Navy's Silver Strand Boat Lanes at Naval Base Coronado, and at Otay Landfill and Sycamore Landfill.

The No Action Alternative was also analyzed in the EA. Under this alternative, no dredging would occur in the Pier 5000 SSI berth expansion footprint and sediment surface would not be altered by dredging activities. Under this alternative, the Pier 5000 SSI berth would not meet navigation and berthing depth requirements as established by Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA).

The Proposed Action (Preferred Alternative) has been selected over the Reduced Dredging Footprint Alternative as it most effectively meets the purpose and need for the project providing an increased level of maneuverability and access capacity for large submarines at Pier 5000. The selected alternative does not result in significant impacts to the human and natural environment.

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**Environmental Effects:** The following is a summary of the environmental consequences of the Proposed Action:

Air Quality/Climate Change: Construction activities associated with the Proposed Action would generate a small amount of temporary exhaust emissions from the use of heavy equipment and barges. However, as the total duration of the project is likely to be approximately 10 days, the emissions of pollutants into the air would be minor, short-term, and would not exceed any federal, state, or local *de minimis* threshold. Therefore, implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts to air quality.

Water Resources: Implementation of the Proposed Action would include dredging underwater sediments of the Bay bottom at the Pier 5000 South Side Inner Berth Expansion site, loading dredged material onto barge(s), transporting dredged material to disposal locations via barge, and direct underwater disposal at the LA-5 ODMDS. This in-water work would increase turbidity associated with suspension of bottom sediments. However, increases in turbidity would be short-term and temporary as sediments would settle back to the Bay floor following cessation of dredging activities.

Best management practices implemented as part of the Proposed Action that would reduce, minimize, or avoid increases in water turbidity or improper sediment disposal include: vessel speed limits, a prohibition on hydraulic dredging, spill control and GPS monitoring of sediment transport barge(s), and controls and limits on dredge volumes and rate of production.

Additionally, the sediment in the project footprint and in surrounding areas at NBPL have been found to be suitable for unconfined aquatic disposal by the United States (U.S.) Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and therefore resuspension of project dredge material would not be expected to be detrimental to overall area water quality. Therefore, implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts to water resources.

Marine Biological Resources: Implementation of the Proposed Action would result in temporary noise and sediment disturbance to the habitat of benthic organisms; however, as the habitat would be re-colonized following the completion of the proposed dredging activities, this impact would be less than significant.

Project activities would result in temporary displacement of marine birds and minimal alterations to their foraging conditions and/or prey availability; however, these impacts would be minor because of the project's limited scale and duration. No dredging activities would occur during the California least tern breeding season.

Further, sediment disposal would occur offshore and would not affect western snowy plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus*) habitats along the coast, including those at Naval Air Station North Island. Therefore, implementation of the Proposed Action would not have a significant adverse effect under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and there would be no significant impacts to other non-migratory marine bird species and their habitats or to Federally listed bird species.

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Underwater noise generated during dredging activities would cause minor disturbance to fish within the immediate project vicinity. Fish may temporarily leave the project area during the period of time when dredging is occurring. However, the underwater noise conditions during dredging would not vary substantially from normal noise levels in the area. Fish would return to the project area upon completion. Therefore, implementation of the Proposed Action would not have a significant effect on fish or EFH.

Underwater noise generated during dredging activities would disturb marine mammals in the vicinity and they may leave the project area during the duration of dredging activities. However, implementation of avoidance and minimization measures (i.e., visual monitoring for noise-sensitive species during dredging and limiting noise generated by dredging equipment by using a clamshell grab dredge) would prevent impacts to fish and marine mammals. Additionally, increased underwater noise and activity would not vary substantially from normal levels of activity in the immediate area and would cease when dredging activities ended.

No long-term noise effects would occur as part of the Proposed Action. Underwater noise levels associated with dredging are below marine mammal thresholds for injury but are above thresholds for behavior. However, because the acoustic zone is small, and ambient conditions in the vicinity of the Proposed Action are similar to those generated by dredging activities, impacts to these species would not be significant and would be minimized by implementing monitoring and project shutdown zones.

Eelgrass is the only special aquatic site found in proximity to the project area and is found approximately 960 feet (292.6 meters) northwest and 765 feet (233.2 meters) southeast of the project area. It will not be affected by the Proposed Action.

If the invasive seaweed species *Caulerpa taxifolia* is found anywhere in the project area, the approved National Marine Fisheries Service *Caulerpa* Control Protocols would be followed including additional surveys and eradication (mechanical or chemical removal), if necessary. Therefore, dredging activities would not result in significant impacts to marine plants or special aquatic sites.

Green sea turtles are not common in the project area but do occur throughout the Bay. Dredging activities have the potential to disturb sea turtles through vessel movement, construction-related noise, and water quality degradation. Visual monitoring for sea turtles will be required, as described below, to ensure no significant impacts to turtles occur.

Implementation of the following best management practices would ensure there would be no significant effect on these resources: (1) dredging activities would occur between 16 September and 31 March to avoid the nesting season of the California least tern; (2) a pre-dredging survey for *Caulerpa*, would be conducted; and (3) monitoring for green sea turtle and marine mammals and a prohibition on hydraulic dredging methods during all dredging activities would occur if they are observed. Therefore, there would be no significant impacts to biological resources from implementation of the Proposed Action.

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Noise: Airborne noise associated with implementation of the Proposed Action would be of short duration and generally consistent with existing noise levels at the project site which is a military working waterfront. The nearest human noise sensitive receptor to the dredging area is a child development center 0.4 miles away, but project-related noise would not exceed regulatory thresholds at this site.

Per the discussion regarding underwater noise in the marine Biological Resources section, and in the above regarding sensitive human receptors, the proposed dredging activities would not significantly or permanently alter either the airborne or underwater noise environment. Therefore, implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in significant noise-related impacts to sensitive receptors.

Transportation and Traffic: The primary source of traffic from the Proposed Action would be sediment transport barges transiting between the Pier 5000 site and the LA-5 ODMDS disposal site. Project vessel traffic in and around the Bay would abide by existing charts and buoyed navigation channels and would be comparatively negligible in volume relative to the existing vessel traffic in and around the Bay. Therefore, implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in significant traffic-related impacts.

Hazardous Materials and Wastes: Implementation of the Proposed Action would result in no change to the storage, use, transportation, or disposal of hazardous substances or wastes. Further, through laboratory testing and consultation with the USEPA and USACE the dredged sediments have been found to be sufficiently free of contaminants, nonhazardous, and to be suitable for unconfined aquatic disposal. Therefore, the Proposed Action dredged materials will likely be disposed of at the LA-5 ODMDS and implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts related to hazardous materials and wastes.

**Finding:** Based on analysis presented in the EA and in coordination with the USEPA Region IX and the USACE Carlsbad Field Office, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service Southwest Region, and California Coastal Commission, the Navy finds that the implementation of the Proposed Action would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary.

The EA prepared by the Navy addressing this action is on file and interested parties may obtain a copy from: NBPL Pier 5000 South Side Inner Berths Expansion Dredging EA Project Manager, Department of the Navy, NAVFAC Southwest, Coastal EV, 750 Pacific Highway, 12<sup>th</sup> Floor, San Diego, California, 92132.

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Date

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