

1 Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Assessment/Environmental Impact Report

Date: February 13, 2024

Project Title: San Francisco Bay Federal Channels Operation and Maintenance Dredging and Sediment Placement Activities (Proposed Project)

CEQA Lead Agency: San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board

Project Applicant: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), as the lead federal agency, and the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board (Water Board) are preparing a joint Environmental Assessment (EA) and Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for Operations and Maintenance dredging of the federal navigational channels in San Francisco Bay, and for dredged material placement in the San Francisco Bay Region. Under CEQA, upon deciding to prepare an EIR, the Water Board, as the CEQA lead agency, must issue a Notice of Preparation (NOP) to inform responsible and trustee agencies and the public of its decision. This documentation will be consistent with the previously prepared Environmental Assessment/Environmental Impact Report for Maintenance Dredging of the Federal Navigation Channels in San Francisco Bay: Fiscal Years 2015-2024 (2015-2024 EA/EIR), and other approved management plans. The Water Board is requesting your agency's comments on the scope and content of the environmental information that is relevant to your agency's statutory responsibilities regarding the proposed project. Your agency may need to use the EIR when considering your permit or other approval for the project.

The project location, description, and the potential environmental impacts are described in the attached materials.

Due to the time limits mandated by State law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date, but not later than 30 days after the notice date. Please send your response to Jazzy Graham-Davis (Jazzy.Graham-Davis@Waterboards.ca.gov), along with the name for a contact person in your agency.

COMMENTS AND SCOPING MEETING

Written comments on the scope of the EA/EIR should be sent to the Water Board, c/o Jazzy Graham-Davis (Jazzy.Graham-Davis@Waterboards.ca.gov). Comments must be received by 5:00 pm March 14, 2024. The scoping period will run from February 13, 2024 through March 14, 2024. A meeting will be held during the scoping period, the date, time, and meeting location are listed, as follows:

San Francisco Regional Water Quality Control Board
1515 Clay Street, Room 1505
Oakland CA 94612
Tuesday, March 5, 4:00 to 6:00 pm

The meeting may also be attended virtually. It is requested that all parties interested in attending either in person or virtually pre-register at the following link: [Meeting Registration - Zoom](#). Please describe any accommodations or translation needs by Feb. 28.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

PROJECT LOCATION

The federal navigation channels and associated placement sites are located in the San Francisco Bay, which spans 11 counties, including Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Santa Clara, San Francisco, San Mateo, Solano, and Sonoma. However, the geographic scope of the potential impacts of the proposed project are limited to 11 federally authorized navigation channels (though the Suisun Slough is not anticipated to be dredged during this period and will not be included in the EA/EIR) and associated placement sites in the San Francisco Bay (defined herein as including San Francisco, San Pablo, Suisun bays) (Figure 1).

PROJECT PURPOSE, NEED, AND GOAL

The USACE, as mandated by Congress, has the authority to maintain navigability of federal navigation channels to authorized depth. Accumulation of sediment that settles in these channels can impede navigability and represent navigation safety hazards. Maintenance dredging removes this sediment and returns the channels to authorized depths to provide safe, reliable, and efficient waterborne transportation systems (channels, harbors, and waterways) for the movement of commerce, national security needs, and recreation. USACE's purpose of the project is to continue maintenance dredging of the federal navigation channels in San Francisco Bay consistent with navigation project authorizations and as laid out in the USACE 20-year Regional Dredge Material Management Plan (RDMMP). Where practicable, the project would be aligned with the goals of the Long-Term Management Strategy for Placement of Dredged Material in the San Francisco Bay Region (LTMS) program, as described in the 1998 LTMS Final EIS/EIR and the 2001 LTMS Management Plan, while adequately protecting the environment, including listed species.

The Water Board has authority under Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 401 and the Porter-Cologne Act to issue permits governing dredge and fill activities. The Water Board will consider USACE's application for a 5-year Section 401 Water Quality Certification (WQC)/Waste Discharge Requirements (WDR) for continued maintenance dredging of San Francisco Bay federal channels and associated dredged materials placement. To issue a WQC/WDR to USACE, the Water Board, in compliance with CEQA, must analyze and disclose potential water quality and other environmental impacts of the project; consider alternatives that would avoid or substantially reduce potentially significant impacts of the project as approved; adopt or make a condition of approval all feasible mitigation for potentially significant impacts; and demonstrate that all applicable state water quality requirements are met.

The Water Board's overall project goal is to ensure USACE's consistency with the Water Quality Standards adopted in the Water Quality Control Plan for the San Francisco Bay Basin (Basin Plan), as will be addressed through the WQC process.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The USACE, in coordination with the Water Board and other stakeholders, has been performing dredging and placement activities in San Francisco Bay for decades. This project is consistent with the activities presented and analyzed in the 2015-2024 EA/EIR; the 2025-2034 EA/EIR will update the activities and analysis therein.

The Proposed Project includes the operation and maintenance of the 11 federal navigation channels (though the Suisun Slough is not anticipated to be dredged during this period and will not be included in the EA/EIR) and use of the associated federally-designated or alternate placement sites in and near San Francisco Bay for the next 10 years, anticipated to begin in 2025. The USACE proposes that each federal navigation channel would continue to be dredged as needed, depending on shoaling and available funding. The frequency of dredging would range from annual activities to those that may occur only once during the 10-year planning horizon. Dredging activities would be consistent with the 2015-2024 EA/EIR and other approved management plans and where appropriate incorporates new information on dredging impacts, including those to newly listed species, and environmental benefits from beneficial use of dredged material (beneficial reuse).

The USACE's current maintenance dredging typically involves four steps: 1) testing for sediment quality and placement suitability determination; 2) removing recently shoaled sediment from the dredging site to restore authorized navigation channel dimensions; 3) transporting the dredged material by barges, hopper dredges, or pipeline to the placement site; and 4) placing the dredged material at the designated placement site(s).

Before conducting dredging activities under the Proposed Project, the USACE would continue to sample and analyze sediment to determine its suitability for various placement and beneficial reuse alternatives based on its physical, chemical, and biological characteristics. Current maintenance dredging typically includes hydraulic dredging, mechanical dredging, and/or knockdowns. Current hydraulic dredging usually involves hopper dredges, or cutterhead suction attached to hydraulic pipelines that convey dredged material to a barge or directly onto a placement site. Current mechanical dredging usually involves bucket or clamshell dredges, which scoop material into a barge for transport to a placement site.

Current knockdowns use a clamshell or other equipment to smooth high spots into immediately adjacent deeper areas, without transport to an offsite placement location. The USACE proposes to conduct dredging activities within the environmental work windows to the maximum extent practicable and in coordination with regulatory agencies.

The USACE proposes to continue to place dredged material at established placement sites. As proposed, placement would be dependent on sediment characteristics. Current dredged material placement sites in the San Francisco Bay Area include the existing federally-designated aquatic in-Bay placement sites SF-9, SF-10, SF-11, and SF-16; the existing federally-designated ocean placement sites SF-8, San Francisco Deep Ocean Disposal Site (SFDODS), and SF-17; and several permitted and operational beneficial reuse sites, including, but not limited to, SF-17 Ocean Beach, Montezuma Wetlands Restoration Project, and Cullinan Ranch Restoration Project (see Figure 1). Additionally, USACE places material at sponsor-provided upland sites for certain channels such as Napa River and Petaluma River. In the near future, it is expected that new beneficial reuse sites may be available, such as the Bel Marin Keys wetland restoration site, and other nearshore strategic placement sites or other Engineering with Nature beneficial reuse methods. These will undergo additional environmental impact review under CEQA and/or NEPA as appropriate and necessary permitting actions before they are used by USACE or other dredgers.

PROBABLE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The purpose of the EA/EIR is to analyze, in a public setting, the potential impacts associated with the Proposed Project, and identify and evaluate the comparative merits of a range of reasonable alternatives to the Proposed Project that feasibly attain most of the basic project objectives, are potentially feasible and would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant impacts.

Primary areas of analysis for this project will include, but will not be limited to, sediment quality, sedimentation, and circulation; air quality; biological resources including federally and state-listed fish species; greenhouse gases; water quality; noise; hazardous materials; marine navigation; environmental justice; and tribal cultural resources.

In addition, the EA/EIR will also evaluate cumulative impacts of the Proposed Project, including effects of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects in the vicinity. Where significant impacts are identified, feasible mitigation measures to minimize or avoid those impacts will be described.

OTHER AGENCIES WHO'S APPROVAL MAY BE REQUIRED

The San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) will consider the USACE's request for consistency certification pursuant to the Coastal Zone Management Act.

The management of dredging and dredged material placement in the San Francisco Bay Region is coordinated through the Dredged Material Management Office, consisting of the USACE, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Water Board, BCDC, and the California State Lands Commission.

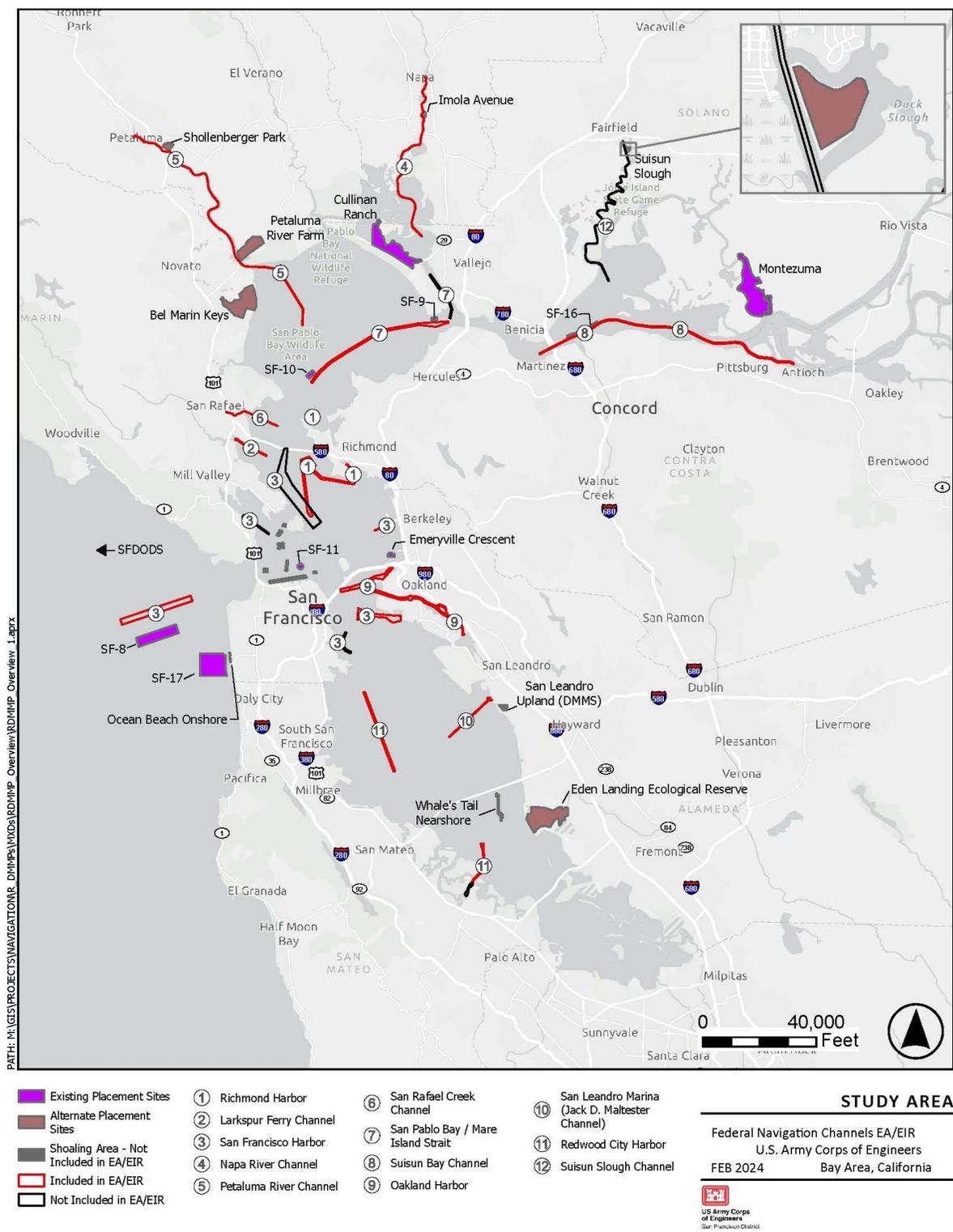


Figure 1. Study Area for the San Francisco Bay Federal Channels Operation and Maintenance Dredging and Sediment Placement Activities