

This objection is disappointing as we, USACE, felt we had been working hand in hand with all our State and Federal partners and resource agencies since we began coordination regarding this project nearly 3.5 years ago.

During this process, we have had numerous opportunities for not only public engagement but also input from our State and Federal resource agency partners. For example, our project team formed Technical Working Groups (TWG) for different aspects of the project, such as cultural / historic resources, wetlands and beneficial use of dredged material. These TWGs were formed at various times through the development and drafting of the project's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The TWGs included members from federal and state agencies with regulatory responsibilities and concerns, including those from NC Division of Water Resources, National Marine Fisheries, and the NC Wildlife Resources Commission. The TWGs contained multiple subject matter experts who provided valuable feedback related to available information, wetlands model selection, model application strategies, and modifications to improve and verify the accuracy of the models' inputs and outputs.

The TWGs also allowed dozens of local experts, academics, historians, landowners and managers to provide input to the USACE about possible sites for beneficial use of dredged material (BUDM) for the proposed project.

Given all the integration and engagement throughout this process, the objection provided at this late stage in the process is disconcerting. Many of the issues identified had a specific TWG, with the State's involvement, dedicated to identifying, addressing and resolving these issues in a collaborative manner.

The Corps remains committed to working with our State and Federal partners to finish our assigned task which remains to conduct the necessary analysis for producing a Letter Report to the ASA (CW) that addresses the unresolved comments of the conditional authorization of a 47' deepening of Wilmington Harbor in Section 403 of WRDA 2020 and completing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed project. The comments to be addressed were conveyed in the May 2020 ASA(CW) Review Assessment of the NC State Port Authority's (NCSPA) Section 203 feasibility study of improvements to the Federal navigation project at Wilmington Harbor.

Since receipt of this determination, we along with our partner in the NCSPA are in the process of reviewing the content of their letter to determine how we will proceed.

Since we are very early in this review, we cannot yet give a specific date for completion.

Best,

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