

DRAFT

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**Bendway Weir Construction – Mississippi River
At Barfield (River Mile 811R AHP)
Mississippi County, Arkansas**



**U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Mississippi Valley Division
Regional Planning and Environmental Division South**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 PROPOSED ACTION	3
1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION	3
1.3 AUTHORITY FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION	3
1.4 PRIOR REPORTS	3
1.5 PUBLIC CONCERNS	3
2.0 ALTERNATIVES	4
2.1 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE	4
2.2 INCREASE DREDGING	4
2.3 INSTALL DIKES ALONG OUTSIDE BEND	4
2.4 INSTALL BENDWAY WEIRS ALONG OUTSIDE BEND	4
3.0. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT	5
3.0.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING	5
3.0.2 DESCRIPTION OF WATERSHED	5
3.0.3 CLIMATE	5
3.0.4 GEOLOGY	5
3.1 RELEVANT RESOURCES	5
3.1.1 WILDLIFE	7
3.1.2 WETLANDS	7
3.1.3 THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES	8
3.1.4 CULTURAL RESOURCES	8
3.1.5 SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESOURCES	9
3.1.6 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE	9
3.1.7 AIR QUALITY	9
3.1.8 WATER QUALITY AND HYDROLOGY	9
3.1.9 AQUATIC RESOURCES AND FISHERIES	10
4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES	10
4.1 WILDLIFE	10
4.2 WETLANDS	10
4.3 THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES	11
4.4 CULTURAL RESOURCES	12
4.5 SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESOURCES	12
4.6 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE	13
4.7 AIR QUALITY	13
4.8 WATER QUALITY AND HYDROLOGY	13
4.9 AQUATIC RESOURCES AND FISHERIES	14
4.10 NAVIGATION	14
4.11 HAZARDOUS, TOXIC, AND RADIOACTIVE WASTE (HTRW)	15
4.12 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS	15

5.0 COORDINATION 16

6.0 MITIGATION..... 17

7.0 COMPLIANCE WITH ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS AND REGULATIONS..... 17

8.0 CONCLUSION 17

9.0 PREPARERS..... 17

10.0 REFERENCES..... 18

APPENDIX

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Mississippi River Valley Regional Planning and Environmental Division South, Environmental Compliance Branch, has prepared this draft environmental assessment (EA) to evaluate impacts associated with the proposed construction of five bendway weirs along the right descending bank of the Mississippi River near Barfield at River Mile 811R above head of passes (AHP) in Mississippi County, Arkansas (Figure 1). The project site is located along a sharp outside bend of the Mississippi River. Point bar accretion across from this outside bend is narrowing the navigation channel and directing swift currents along the riverbank. The swift currents and high water velocities pull towboats toward the banks making it extremely difficult and hazardous to safely navigate the river bend from either direction. Bendway weirs are low, totally submerged stone structures extending riverward from the outside bank of the river bend into the channel. The structures are constructed in deep water and at low elevations (i.e. remain 30 feet or more underwater even at low river stages) allowing for safe passage of navigation traffic. A series of weirs are installed in a bendway to form a functional system. These underwater bendway weirs direct the river currents away from their respective bank, remove the outer edge of the encroaching sandbar, and extend the navigation channel away from the riverbank. Towboats then have a wider channel and a smoother river bend to navigate. If left unchecked, encroaching point bars would further narrow the navigation channel allowing for swifter currents along the outside bends, increasing risks of a towboat accident.

This draft EA provides sufficient information on the potential adverse and beneficial environmental effects to allow the District Commander, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Memphis District, to make an informed decision on the appropriateness of an environmental impact statement (EIS) or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the proposed installation of bendway weirs in the Mississippi River near River Mile 811R AHP. This document has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and the Council on Environmental Quality's Regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508), as reflected in the USACE Engineering Regulation ER 200-2-2.

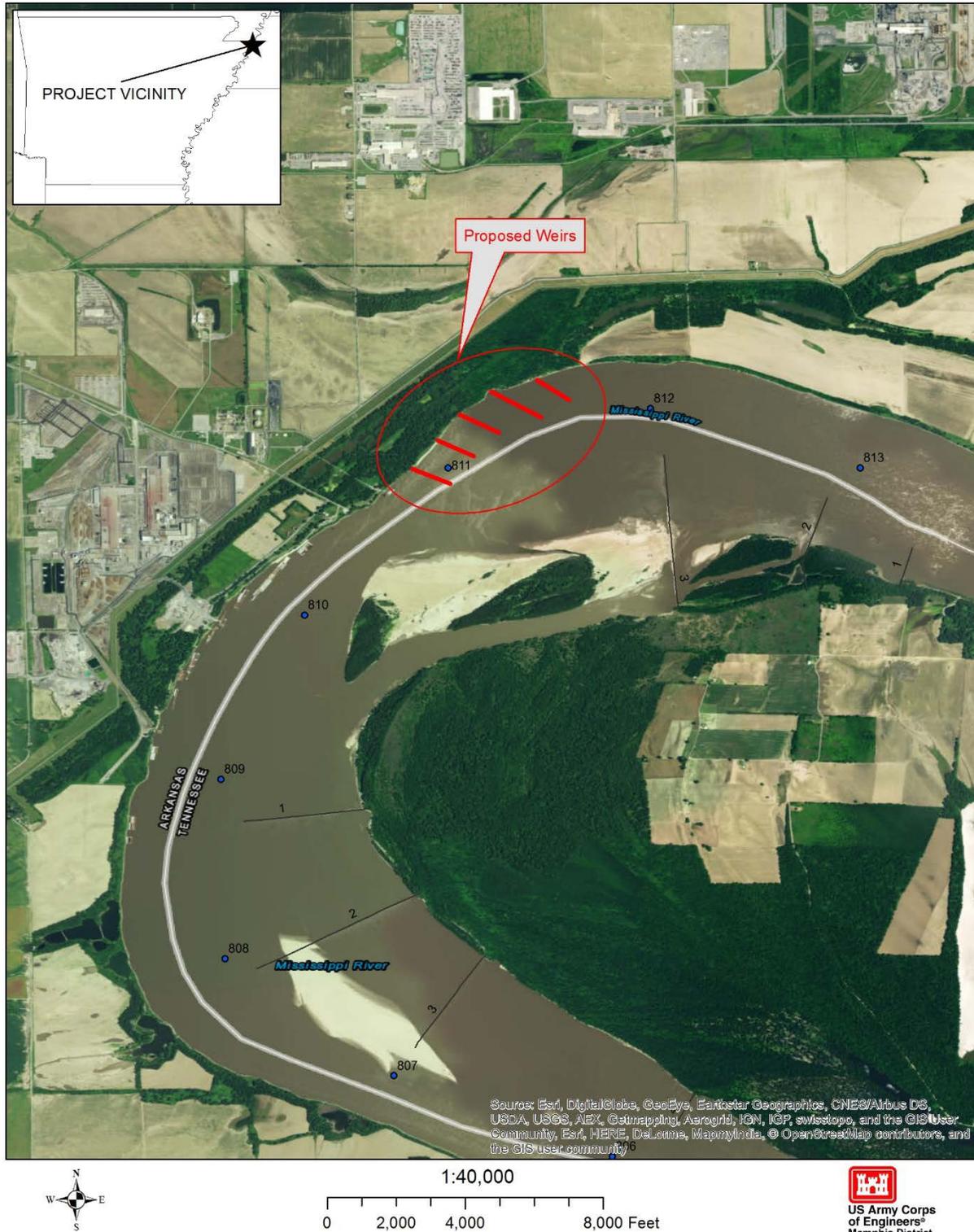


Figure 1. Project map of the five proposed bendway weirs located along the right descending bank of the Mississippi River near River Mile 811 above head of passes (AHP) in Mississippi County, Arkansas.

1.1 Proposed Action. The proposed work includes placement of approximately 560,000 tons of Graded Stone A in five bendway weirs in Mississippi County, Arkansas. Crown widths of the bendway weirs will be approximately 6 feet, and the weirs will extend riverward from the right descending bank for a distance of approximately 600-1,100 feet. A 3-ft. thickness of rock paving consisting of Graded Stone C will extend approximately 200 feet upstream and 200 feet downstream of each weir where it ties into the bank for stability. The tops of all weirs would be constructed to an elevation of 30 feet below the Low Water Reference Plane (i.e. -30 LWRP). The LWRP is a computed water surface elevation profile based on low discharge statistics for a long period of daily gage records (i.e. the 97 percent exceedance discharge over a 20-year period of record). Thus, there would be at least 30 feet or more of water over the tops of the weirs even at low river stages to ensure safe navigation. A plan sheet showing the typical profile of the weirs is included in the appendix.

1.2 Purpose And Need For The Proposed Action. The purpose of this project is to create a safer navigation channel for towboats in the Mississippi River by reducing the strong drafting currents that presently exist at this location. Continued towboat navigation through this hazardous Mississippi River bend increases the risk of an accident. Barges could break loose and block safe navigation of the river. If hazardous or toxic materials are involved, serious concerns for public safety, including adverse environmental impacts could arise.

1.3 Authority. This project is authorized by the Flood Control Act of 15 May 1928, Public Law No. 391-70, as amended and supplemented by subsequent Acts of Congress. This Act authorized the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) Project, which included channel improvement and stabilization works for stabilizing the channel to provide an efficient navigation alignment and protection of flood control features in the Lower Mississippi River (LMR).

1.4 Prior Reports. Subsequent legislation has resulted in many modifications to the 1928 Flood Control Act resulting in several studies and appurtenant documents. Of particular significance is the 1976 Environmental Impact Statement for the Mississippi River and Tributaries, Mississippi River Levees and Channel Improvement Project (USACE 1976). The EIS addressed the mainstem flood risk management and navigation features of the MR&T Project located in the Lower Mississippi River Valley, between Cairo, Illinois and Venice, Louisiana. The project, as disclosed in the EIS, is designed to make the Mississippi River more navigable and manage risks associated with flooding by utilizing channel training devices, levees, and maintenance and construction of the mainstem levees and key harbors. Alternatives included no action, alternative maintenance measures, maintenance of existing project efficiency, storage of excess floodwaters in reservoirs, dredging to increase the hydraulic capacity of the Mississippi River, additional cutoffs to increase the hydraulic capacity of the river, diverting flood flows, widening existing floodways, and alternative construction and maintenance methods.

1.5 Public Concerns. The navigation industry has expressed a need to widen the navigation channel at the project area in order to safely navigate the narrow navigation channel and swift currents along this outside bend.

2.0 ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION

For the purposes of NEPA, the no-action alternative serves as the baseline against which impacts and benefits of the action alternatives are evaluated. A description of each alternative is included below.

2.1 No action. The no-action alternative is defined as termination of the proposed project. The encroaching point bar would further narrow the navigation channel allowing for swifter currents along the outside bends. The unsafe navigation conditions through this river bend would continue to worsen increasing the risk of a towboat accident.

2.2 Increase dredging in this river reach. Increasing dredging along this river reach to maintain safe navigation would be costly. The current estimate for dredging at the project location is approximately \$90,000 per day. Navigation traffic would also be temporarily disrupted during dredge activities due to work within the narrow navigation channel. The amount of sand that would be required to be removed from the encroaching sandbar could not be moved in sufficient time to stabilize the channel prior to the next high river stage. The sandbar would be expected to redevelop soon after dredging ceases thus negating the dredging efforts and expenses. Annual dredging would likely be needed at the project location.

2.3 Install high dikes along the outside banks. High dikes would rise above the water surface at low and intermediate river stages and extend out into the navigation channel in these narrow bends. The dikes would efficiently direct the river currents away from the outside banks; however, at low and intermediate river stages, the dikes would create an even narrower navigation channel and would be hazardous to navigation. Some minor grading would also be required to tie the dikes into the banks. Temporary disruption of navigation traffic would occur due to construction activities within the narrow navigation channel during low water events.

2.4 Install underwater bendway weirs. Bendway weirs would redirect the swift currents away from the riverbanks. This would make for safer towboat transit of this outside river bend. The weirs would remain 30 feet or more underneath the towboats so there would be no navigation hazards. Any disruption of navigation traffic would be temporary and only during active construction. The weirs would eventually remove small portions of the sandbar encroaching from across the river. This would widen the channel and reduce the swift currents along the toe of the revetted river bank. Both navigation channel and river currents would be modified sufficiently such that dredging needs would be reduced or eliminated. No grading or excavation would be required for this work. Installing underwater weirs would be less costly than building high dikes or increased dredging operations in this river reach.

The no action alternative was determined to be unacceptable because of the increasing risks of accidents at the proposed project location. Alternative 2.2 would require work on a near-annual basis and likely disrupt navigation traffic as a result. Alternative 2.3 would result in temporary disruption of navigation traffic during construction and would result in a narrower channel during low and intermediate river stages when the dikes were exposed. Alternative 2.4 would result in a temporary disruption of navigation traffic during active construction; however, it

would allow navigation traffic to safely pass over the structures at all river stages upon completion. Alternative 2.4 offered the best compromise of environmental impacts and project costs, and thus was selected as the proposed action.

3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

3.0.1 Environmental Setting. The proposed project area is located along the right descending bank of the Mississippi River near River Mile 811 AHP in Mississippi County, Arkansas (Figure 1). This reach of the Mississippi River consists of a sharp river bend. The mainline Mississippi River Levee traverses southwest throughout this reach located approximately 1,500–2,000 feet landside of top bank. The lands surrounding the proposed project area are predominantly agricultural and forested lands with some industrial land scattered throughout. Along the outside bend and immediately downstream of the project limits are a barge loading facility handling various commodities and a large steel fabrication facility. An encroaching sand point bar exists across the channel from the project limits.

3.0.2 Description of Watershed. The proposed project area is located in the Lower Mississippi-Memphis Watershed, Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) 08010100, which drains approximately 152 square miles. The average ground elevation within this watershed is approximately 168 feet with little relief. Within the Arkansas portion of the watershed, land use is dominated by crops (43%), forest (34%), and water (14%) (NLCD 2006).

3.0.3 Climate. The climate of the proposed project area is characterized by long, warm summers, comparatively short, mild winters, and abundant rainfall. Snow is rare and most winter precipitation falls as rain, but occasional cold fronts can bring temperatures near or below freezing. The total annual precipitation averages approximately 50 inches. Average annual maximum and minimum temperatures are approximately 70 degrees and 51 degrees Fahrenheit, respectively.

3.0.4 Geology. The proposed project area is located within the Mississippi Alluvial Valley, which formed by glacial melt waters carrying large amounts of water, silt, sand, and gravel from the country's interior down to the Gulf Coast. The alluvial valley is bordered on the east by bluffs and on the west by merging valleys of the principal tributaries and ranges in width from approximately 30 to 90 miles (Saucier 1994). Quaternary deposits within the alluvial valley consist of various abandoned channels and point bar deposits of historic Mississippi River meander belts. The fluvial-geomorphic history determines the individual soil types at specific locations. The majority of the soils within the immediate project footprint are sand alluvium.

3.1 RELEVANT RESOURCES

This section contains a description of those resources that could be impacted by the proposed project. The important resources described in this section (Table 1) are those recognized by laws, executive orders, regulations, and other standards of national, state, or regional agencies and organizations; technical or scientific agencies, groups, or individuals; and the general public.

The following resources have been considered and found to not be affected by the alternatives under consideration: recreation resources, prime and unique farmlands, terrestrial resources, essential fish habitat, estuarine water bodies, beaches, gulf water bottoms, and aesthetics.

Table 1: Relevant Resources

Resource	Institutionally Important	Technically Important	Publicly Important
Wildlife	Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act of 1958, as amended; the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918; and Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940, as amended	They are a critical element of many valuable aquatic and terrestrial habitats; they are an indicator of the health of various aquatic and terrestrial habitats; and many species are important commercial resources.	The high priority that the public places on their aesthetic, recreational, and commercial value.
Wetlands	Clean Water Act of 1977, as amended; Executive Order 11990 of 1977, Protection of Wetlands; EO 11988, and Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act.	They provide necessary habitat for various species of plants, fish, and wildlife; they serve as ground water recharge areas; they provide storage areas for storm and flood waters; they serve as natural water filtration areas; they provide protection from wave action, erosion, and storm damage; and they provide various consumptive and non-consumptive recreational opportunities.	The public places a high value on the functions and values that wetlands provide. Environmental organizations and the public support the preservation of marshes and other wetlands.
Threatened and Endangered Species	The Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended.	Federal and state wildlife agencies cooperate to protect these species. The status of such species provides an indication of the overall health of an ecosystem.	The public supports the preservation of rare or declining species and their habitats.
Cultural Resources	National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended; the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990; and the Archeological Resources Protection Act of 1979	State and Federal agencies document and protect important sites because of their association or linkage to past events, to historically important persons, to design and construction values, and for their ability to yield important information about prehistory and history.	Preservation groups and private individuals support protection and enhancement of historical resources.
Socio-Economic Resources	River and Harbor Act and Flood Control Act of 1970 (PL 91-611)	N/A	Social concerns and items affecting area economy are of significant interest to community.

Resource	Institutionally Important	Technically Important	Publicly Important
Environmental Justice	Executive Order 12898 and the Department of Defense's Strategy on Environmental Justice of 1995.	The social and economic welfare of minority and low-income populations may be positively or disproportionately impacted by the tentatively selected plans.	Public concerns about the fair and equitable treatment (fair treatment and meaningful involvement) of all people with respect to environmental and human health consequences of federal laws, regulations, policies, and actions.
Air Quality	Clean Air Act of 1963	State and Federal agencies recognize the status of ambient air quality in relation to the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS).	Virtually all citizens express a desire for clean air.
Water Quality and Hydrology	Clean Water Act of 1977, Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act	Federal and state water quality agencies recognize value of fisheries and good water quality. National and state standards are established to assess water quality.	Environmental organizations and the public support the preservation of water quality and fishery resources and the desire for clean drinking water.
Aquatic Resources/ Fisheries	Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act of 1958, as amended	They are a critical element of many valuable freshwater and marine habitats; they are an indicator of the health of the various freshwater and marine habitats; and many species are important commercial resources.	The public places a high priority on their aesthetic, recreational, and commercial value.

3.1.1 WILDLIFE

Existing Conditions: The project area is located entirely within the Mississippi River channel. The project vicinity consists of a mosaic of forested lands, old river channels, borrow pits, and agricultural land. Wildlife expected to utilize the shorelines and adjacent lands include raccoon, opossum, mink, bobcat, coyotes, deer, wild turkey, muskrat, river otter, beaver, turtles, snakes, frogs, toads, hawks, vultures, Mississippi kite, bald eagle, kingfishers, and various songbirds and woodpeckers. Herons, egrets, pelicans, cormorants, killdeer, gulls, terns, bald eagle, osprey, and various shorebirds would be bird species commonly observed utilizing the Mississippi River channel near the project area. A bald eagle nest is located approximately 800 feet upstream of the most upstream weir location.

3.1.2 WETLANDS

Existing Conditions: The proposed project footprint is within the river channel (deepwater habitat); thus, wetlands are not currently present within the proposed work limits. A records search of the National Wetlands Inventory showed most of the forested lands adjacent to the proposed project area as wetlands and nearly all the cleared/agricultural lands as non-wetlands (USFWS 1981). The riparian vegetation immediately adjacent to the proposed project area primarily consists of mature cottonwood and sycamore trees.

3.1.3 THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES

Existing Conditions: Three federally listed species may occur in the vicinity of the proposed project areas: the interior least tern (*Sterna antillarum athalassos*), pallid sturgeon (*Scaphirhynchus albus*), and fat pocketbook mussel (*Potamilus capax*).

Interior Least Terns

The federally endangered interior least tern is the smallest North America tern. In the LMR, interior least terns typically nest on large isolated sandbars from late May to August, depending on specific yearly river stages. Least terns have been documented nesting on the sand point bar across the channel from the proposed project area in 17 of the 27 years surveyed (USACE 1986-2012). The colony size has ranged from a small number of individuals (<50) to as many as 360 individuals throughout the years.

Pallid sturgeon

The federally endangered pallid sturgeon are part of an ancient group of fishes that inhabit benthic habitats of large, turbid rivers of the central United States, such as the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers and several of their major tributaries (and distributaries). Captures of pallid sturgeon in the Mississippi River have been associated with a variety of habitats including the main channel, islands, channel borders, sandbars, gravel bars, dikes, and secondary channels. Recent data has shown that pallid sturgeon positively selected island tips, natural banks, and to a lesser degree, revetted banks, over other habitat features in the LMR (Herrala et al. 2014). Extensive sampling in the Mississippi River is currently underway so that a better understanding of population size, population density, habitat preference, extent of range, and impacts on the population can be quantified. The closest pallid sturgeon detections to the proposed project area are approximately nineteen miles downstream (P. Hartfield, USFWS, pers. communication and J. Killgore, USACE, pers. communication 2014).

Fat pocketbook mussel

The federally endangered fat pocketbook mussel is a relatively large species of freshwater mussel reaching approximately 5 inches in length and native to the Ohio River system and Mississippi River drainage. Fat pocketbook mussels typically inhabit sand and silt depositional areas of slow moving rivers. The largest population is currently found within the St. Francis River Basin in Arkansas, a tributary downstream of the project area. Low densities of fat pocketbook mussels may be found sporadically in the LMR typically within relatively stable secondary channels and side channels (USFWS 2012). The closest fat pocketbook mussel observations near the proposed project area were dead shells in a secondary channel approximately 11 miles downstream (B. Posey, AGFC, pers. communication 2012).

3.1.4 CULTURAL RESOURCES

Existing Conditions: The project area is located within the river channel. There are no National Register of Historic Places properties or recorded shipwrecks within the proposed project footprint.

3.1.5 SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESOURCES

Existing Conditions: Commercial navigation supports a wide array of economic activity on the LMR. Approximately 474 million short tons of cargo were shipped on the LMR in 2011, and the top ranked commodities by tonnage were petroleum and petroleum products (~30 percent of all shipped goods), food and farm products (~28 percent of all shipped goods), and coal (~14 percent of all shipped goods) (IEC 2014). A total of \$4.2 billion in revenue was derived and 18,764 people were employed by the commercial navigation sector in the LMR corridor in 2011(IEC 2014). The proposed project area is located in Mississippi County, Arkansas. The population of Mississippi County in 2016 was estimated at 42,835 with an estimated 7.8 percent decrease from 2010. The median household income of Mississippi County was \$34,612 from 2011-2015. The largest industries in Mississippi County are manufacturing; educational services, health care, social assistance; and retail trade accounting for approximately 60% of paid employees and 82% of the annual payroll.

3.1.6 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Existing Conditions: The Department of Defense’s Strategy on Environmental Justice of 1995, directs Federal agencies to identify and address any disproportionately high adverse human health or environmental effects of Federal actions to minority and/or low-income populations. Minority populations are those persons who identify themselves as Black, Hispanic, Asian American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Pacific Islander. A minority population exists where the percentage of minorities in an affected area either exceeds 50 percent or is meaningfully greater than in the general population. The minority population of Mississippi County is approximately 40% percent.

3.1.7 AIR QUALITY

Existing Conditions: Mississippi County, Arkansas is presently classified as “in attainment” with the state’s air quality requirements. There are no areas where air pollution levels persistently exceed the national ambient air quality standards within the vicinity of the project area.

3.1.8 WATER QUALITY AND HYDROLOGY

Existing Conditions: The Mississippi River reach in Arkansas is designated by the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) as suitable for the propagation of fish/wildlife, primary and secondary contact recreation, and public, industrial, and agricultural water supplies (ADEQ 2008). The proposed work reach of the Mississippi River is not identified on the 303d list of impaired waters for the state of Arkansas nor are there any approved Total Maximum Daily Loads within the proposed river reach (ADEQ 2016).

The LMR flows through a wide alluvial plain averaging between approximately 30 and 90 miles in width and with an average downvalley slope of approximately 0.6 feet per mile (Saucier 1994). River discharge fluctuates seasonally within the LMR with mean discharges

approximately 3 times higher in the high-water months compared to low-water months. The mean discharge for the LMR near the project area is approximately 500,000 cubic feet per second.

3.1.9 AQUATIC RESOURCES AND FISHERIES

Existing Conditions: The proposed work reach is along an outside bend of the LMR. Swift currents flowing along the outside bends provide habitat conditions that are utilized by a diverse community of fishes ranging from open water species such as shads, white and striped bass, skipjack herring, and goldeye, to large benthic fishes such as shovelnose sturgeon, blue sucker, carpsuckers, buffalofishes, catfishes, common carp, and freshwater drum (Baker et al. 1991). The revetted banks are most likely colonized by high densities of hydropsychid caddisflies. The macroinvertebrate community inhabiting the sandy river bottom typically consists of low densities of chironomids, oligochaetes, amphipods, and nematodes.

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

4.1 WILDLIFE

Future Conditions with No Action: There are no reasonably foreseeable changes to the wildlife community expected in the project area compared to existing conditions due to no action.

Future Conditions with the Proposed Action: There could be a temporary displacement of wildlife along the riverbank in the immediate vicinity of the bendway weirs during the placement of rock. Any potential wading birds or other wildlife present would likely move upstream or downstream of the immediate vicinity of the construction operations. Currently, there are no known active rookeries in the immediate vicinity of the proposed project area. All construction activities would be from floating barges in the water and the distance would exceed the recommended 660-ft. buffer from the bald eagle nest located upstream (USFWS 2007). Additionally, construction is expected to occur in late summer and fall after bald eagle young have fledged minimizing the potential for any adverse impacts.

4.2 WETLANDS

Future Conditions with No Action: With the no action alternative, the condition of wetlands near the project area is not likely to significantly change from current conditions. The vast majority of wetlands near the project area are forested wetlands between the levee and topbank of the river. No land use changes or detrimental impacts to these wetlands are expected in the reasonably foreseeable future.

Future Conditions with the Proposed Action: The proposed construction operations would take place entirely within the unvegetated Mississippi River channel (deep water habitat). The bendway weirs would be placed in navigable waters of the U.S. A Draft Section 404(b)(1) Evaluation was prepared for the proposed action and included in the appendix.

4.3 THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES

Future Conditions with No Action: With no action, there would likely be no significant changes to threatened and endangered species and their habitats compared to current conditions. Periodic use of the sandbar downstream and across the river from the project area by interior least terns would continue. Pallid sturgeon are still expected to utilize the variety of channel habitats within the LMR. Protection of federally listed endangered and threatened species would continue through formal and informal consultations under the Endangered Species Act. Most recently, a conservation plan for the interior least tern, pallid sturgeon, and fat pocketbook mussel was developed for the conservation and recovery of these species in the LMR (USACE 2013, Killgore et al. 2014). Effects of future USACE channel improvement activities in the LMR on endangered species are addressed in the Biological Opinion for the Channel Improvement Program, Mississippi River and Tributaries Project, Lower Mississippi River (USFWS 2013).

Future Conditions with the Proposed Action: There are no sandbars or interior least tern nesting colonies along the outside bend where the underwater weirs would be installed. The sand point bar across the river channel from the proposed activities is a regularly used nesting colony in low river stages during the summer nesting season. Construction activities are expected to occur after least terns have fledged. However, if construction activities are required during active nesting, a deviation from the Channel Improvement Program - Best Management Practices (BMPs) would likely be needed since there is a potential to be within the 1,500-ft. seasonal distance buffer at this sharp river bend, in accordance with the 2013 Biological Opinion. Currents from the Mississippi River scour and move sandbars around each year. This is a natural occurrence to which the least tern is adapted. The small portion of the point bar that will eventually erode once the weirs are installed is expected to be less than 15 percent of the entire area of this large sandbar. The sandbar would still contain ample least tern nesting area following project construction. Overall, any adverse effects of the proposed bendway weir construction to least terns would be localized and any redistribution of sediments downstream would result in little loss of overall habitat quantity (USFWS 2013).

Although no pallid sturgeon have been collected in the immediate vicinity of the project area, they could utilize the revetted bank, main channel, and channel border in the vicinity of the project area. The channel border along the edge of the sandbar across from the project area would shift towards the opposite river bank after installation of the bendway weirs. Spawning sites have not yet been documented on the LMR, but spawning is suspected to occur on gravel bars. No gravel bars will be impacted by the proposed work. As referenced in the 2013 Biological Opinion, BMPs include construction activity restrictions during the potential spawning period of the pallid sturgeon from 1 April – 30 June for this activity. Although work is not expected to occur between 1 April and 30 June, if construction was necessary during this time period, a request to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for deviation from the BMPs would be required, in accordance with the Biological Opinion. Overall, no significant adverse impacts to pallid sturgeon are expected due to the proposed actions. As noted in the 2013 USFWS Biological Opinion, bendway weir construction may have some local benefits to pallid sturgeon by providing current velocity shelters behind each weir and increased fish forage potential (USFWS 2013).

The swift river currents and shifting substrate along outside bends of the Mississippi River are not conducive habitat for the fat pocketbook pearly mussel. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that any mussels would be found at the weir sites. The proposed project is not likely to adversely impact the species (USFWS 2013).

The proposed project is part of the Channel Improvement Program for the Mississippi River and Tributaries Project. The potential for adverse effects on the interior least tern, pallid sturgeon, and fat pocketbook mussel resulting from this program, including bendway weir construction, are addressed in the 2013 formal consultation with the USFWS, pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), as amended (USACE 2013, USFWS 2013, Killgore et al. 2014). The proposed activities were presented at past annual partnering meetings with the USFWS, and no special conditions were identified for this proposed item of work. Requirements of Section 7 of the ESA have been fulfilled. However, obligations under Section 7 of the ESA will be reconsidered if new information reveals that the proposed action may affect listed species in a manner or to an extent not previously considered, the proposed action is subsequently modified to include activities which were not considered during this review, or new species are listed or critical habitat designated that might be affected by the proposed action.

4.4 CULTURAL RESOURCES

Future Conditions with No Action: With no action, there would be no anticipated direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to cultural resources.

Future Conditions with the Proposed Action: Pursuant to 36 CFR 800.3(a)(1), the District Archaeologist has determined that this project has no potential to cause effects to historic properties eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Thus, no further Section 106 consultation is required. However, if prehistoric or historic artifacts, human bones, or other archaeological materials subject to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) are found during construction, all activities would cease immediately in that area and the Memphis District Archaeologist would be contacted. SHPO and tribal NAGPRA representatives, the local sheriff, etc., would be contacted as required by state and federal law.

4.5 SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESOURCES

Future Conditions with No Action: The socio-economic resources in the immediate vicinity of the proposed project area are not expected to change from current conditions without implementation of the proposed action. However, there would be an increased risk of towboat accidents and associated impacts to waterborne commerce on the LMR during low water events as the sand point bar encroaches and narrows the navigation channel along this outside bend.

Future Conditions with the Proposed Action: Temporary disruption of waterborne commerce is likely during active construction occurring within the current navigation channel. Navigation traffic would likely be disrupted during hours of active construction; however, navigation traffic would be allowed to pass daily when construction ceased. Upon completion, the proposed action

would result in a more efficient navigation channel and lower the risk of accidents and disruption of waterborne commerce at low river stages throughout this reach of the river. The proposed bendway weirs would be constructed at an elevation of -30 LWRP or lower allowing for safe navigation over the weirs at all river stages.

4.6 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Future Conditions with No Action: The No Action Alternative would have no direct disproportionately high or adverse human health or environmental effects on any minority and/or low-income populations as per Executive Order (E.O.) 12898.

Future Conditions with the Proposed Action: The minority population of Mississippi County does not exceed 50 percent. Under the preferred alternative, construction activities would take place entirely within an outside bend of the existing river channel. Swift currents along outside bends are not conducive to recreation, fishing, or significant use by the public. The Preferred Alternative would have no direct disproportionately high or adverse human health or environmental effects on any minority and/or low-income populations as per E.O. 12898.

4.7 AIR QUALITY

Future Conditions with No Action: Without implementation of the proposed action, air quality in the area would not change.

Future Conditions with the Proposed Action: Any impacts to ambient air quality due to emissions from equipment used for construction operations would be short-term and minor. The equipment used for the proposed action are classified as mobile sources. No permits are required for air emissions from mobile sources within attainment areas. The status of attainment in Mississippi County would not be altered.

4.8 WATER QUALITY AND HYDROLOGY

Future Conditions with No Action: Without implementation of the proposed action, no significant changes to water quality or hydrology would likely occur due to current regulatory mechanisms and the existing management of the river.

Future Conditions with the Proposed Action: Some sediments (mostly sands) would be stirred up when the rocks comprising the bendway weirs are deposited onto the riverbed. This increased sediment load would be local and minor compared to the natural sediment load of the river, especially during high river stages. There would be no significant impacts to hypoxia (i.e. oxygen depletion) in the Gulf of Mexico. Overall, water quality impacts would be minimal during construction, and would quickly return to preconstruction levels after construction. A Section 404(b)(1) evaluation was prepared for the placement of these bendway weirs into the Mississippi River and is included in the appendix. Section 401 water quality certification was requested from the State of Arkansas.

4.9 AQUATIC RESOURCES AND FISHERIES

Future Conditions with No Action: With no action, the aquatic resources and fisheries of the proposed project area would not change from current conditions.

Future Conditions with the Proposed Action: The revetted banks are most likely colonized by high densities of hydropsychid caddisflies. Low densities of chironomids, oligochaetes, amphipods, and nematodes most likely inhabit the sandy substrate along the river bottom. Once the bendway weirs are constructed, there would be an increase in eddy currents near the tips of the structures along the river bottom. High densities of hydropsychid caddisflies would be expected to quickly colonize the large limestone rocks comprising the bendway weirs. During construction, fish are expected to temporarily migrate upstream or downstream and many of the macroinvertebrates would most likely drift downstream. Minimal adverse impacts to aquatic resources are expected with construction, and the expected increase in densities of hydropsychid caddisflies may result in greater utilization of the project locations by benthic fishes. Construction would take place in swift water and thus should not have an effect on bighead or silver carp or other invasive species in the Mississippi River.

4.10 NAVIGATION

Future Conditions with No Action: Without implementation of the proposed action, the sand point bar along the left descending bank across from the proposed project location would continue to encroach into the navigation channel. Navigation hazards at this narrow, sharp bend would increase during low water events increasing the risk for an accident. Construction and maintenance activities associated with the channel improvement program of the MR&T project would continue in other reaches of the LMR with a purpose of providing an efficient navigation alignment.

Future Conditions with the Proposed Action: The purpose of the proposed project is to maintain navigation safety in the Mississippi River. Installing the bendway weirs would involve several barges and small towboats working along an outside river bend containing a narrow and swift navigation channel. The equipment required for bendway weir construction would extend into the narrow navigation channel at the project area causing a temporary disruption of navigation during hours of active construction. The contractor will have a contact pilot on the job at all times to manage towboat traffic and conduct communication with industry. The Coast Guard would be coordinated with during all phases of construction to ensure continued river navigation safety. After project completion, a wider and safer navigation channel is expected in this hazardous river reach. Additionally, bathymetric data would be collected after the installation of the bendway weirs to monitor their performance and associated effects to the main channel. The performance of the weirs would also be discussed with the Towing Industry at annual meetings. The project location would also be further studied with acoustic Doppler current profiler data, if warranted.

4.11 HAZARDOUS, TOXIC, AND RADIOACTIVE WASTE (HTRW)

A search of EPA databases on superfund sites (CERCLIS), toxic release inventory (TRI), Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), and water discharge permits (PCS) revealed that no releases or spills occurred within the proposed work limits. No additional HTRW investigations are recommended unless new information is revealed or HTRW is discovered during construction. If a recognized environmental condition is identified in relation to the project site, the USACE, Memphis District, would take the necessary measures to avoid the recognized environmental condition. If any HTRW is encountered during construction activities, the proper handling and disposal of these materials would be coordinated with the ADEQ.

4.12 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

The Council on Environmental Quality's regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508) implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) define cumulative effects as "the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions (40 CFR 1508.7)." Cumulative effects can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time.

Federal efforts to improve navigation on the Mississippi River began as early as 1820 (USACE 1976). Surveys, maps, and charts were developed for the river, and USACE began the removal of stumps, snags, and other hazards to navigation in 1824. By the middle of the nineteenth century, growing river commerce and increased destruction from flooding created the need for more Federal participation in improvements for navigation and flood control. In 1879, the Mississippi River Commission was created by an Act of Congress to prepare a plan to permanently locate and deepen the navigation channel, stabilize the banks, prevent destructive floods, and promote commerce along the river. Following the disastrous flood of 1927, the Flood Control Act of 1928 was passed committing the Federal Government to a definite program of flood control, channel stabilization, and river regulation, known as the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) Project. The MR&T project has four major features: 1) levees and floodwalls for flood protection, 2) floodways to divert excess flows past critical reaches, 3) channel improvement and stabilization for both navigation and flood control, and 4) tributary basin improvements for flood protection and drainage.

The MR&T project is responsible for many of the physical, hydraulic, and ecological features that presently exist in the LMR (Baker et al. 1991). Dikes, revetment, and bendway weirs found throughout the LMR have resulted in a mosaic of artificial and natural habitats utilized by aquatic organisms and wildlife, including at least 91 species of freshwater fishes (Baker et al. 1991). Bendway cutoffs constructed between 1929 and 1960 shortened the river by approximately 150 miles (Winkley 1977). Levee construction has greatly reduced the amount of seasonally inundated floodplain throughout the region. Keeping the channel from naturally meandering has reduced the formation of new slackwater habitats in the floodplain. Since 1960, channel engineering has resulted in a loss in the number of secondary channels and associated habitats (Williams and Clouse 2003). The primary environmental effects of the MR&T project and channel improvement activities include the physical loss of channel habitat quantity, a

growing disconnect with the relict floodplain during low to moderate river stages, and a general loss of riverine habitat complexity (USACE 2013, Killgore et al. 2014). Efforts to maintain, restore, and improve habitat values in the LMR have increased in recent years. In 2012 and 2013, ten thousand acres of batture, an area of active floodplain riverward of the levees, were placed under easement and reforested to increase the contiguous forested wetlands along the LMR (IEC 2014). Over 873,000 acres of wetlands have been restored as part of the Wetland Reserve Program in the LMR corridor encompassing lands both within and outside of the levee system (IEC 2014). A programmatic conservation plan was developed in 2013 detailing the actions and mechanisms by which the Channel Improvement Program of the MR&T project implements conservation measures to maintain and improve habitat values within the LMR (USACE 2013, Killgore et al. 2014). The number and condition of secondary channels are monitored on the LMR and opportunities to maintain and restore connectivity are discussed and implemented annually (USACE 2013, USFWS 2013, Killgore et al. 2014).

Maintenance dredging and construction and maintenance of channel improvement structures on the LMR, as part of the MR&T program, are conducted annually. In the immediate vicinity of the project footprint, various revetments and associated maintenance activities have been constructed along this outside river bend since 1917. Most recently, there is ongoing (summer of 2017) placement of articulated concrete mattress on top of the existing damaged revetment for a length of approximately 2,600 feet along the bank in and adjacent to the project area. The proposed bendway weirs at the project location would result in the addition of permanently inundated rock substrates at this outside bend adding to the mosaic of artificial and natural habitats of the LMR. The extent of the encroaching sand point bar located across the channel from the proposed project location would be slightly reduced after construction resulting in a wider navigation channel. The preferred alternative would result in some minor alterations to the environment; however, no significant adverse cumulative impacts are expected due to the proposed action. Maintaining the navigation channel is part of an overall comprehensive plan for the MR&T Project. The direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts for other portions of the MR&T and associated project were previously addressed in the Prior Reports Section, above. The discussions of potential cumulative impacts contained in the cited documents are incorporated herein by reference. Overall, the project, in comparison to past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects, will not incrementally contribute adversely to the general project area.

5.0 COORDINATION

Comments are being solicited from the public; federal, state and local agencies and officials; Indian Tribes; and other interested parties in order to consider and evaluate the impacts of the proposed activity. Any comments received will be considered by USACE to determine whether to modify or condition the project. The following agencies, as well as other interested parties, will receive copies of this draft EA and the draft finding of no significant impact (FONSI):

U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region VI
U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service, State Conservationist

6.0 MITIGATION

The Council on Environmental Quality's regulations (40 CFR 1508.20) implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) define "mitigation" as including a) avoiding the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action; b) minimizing impacts by limiting the degree or magnitude of the action and its implementation; c) rectifying the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment; d) reducing or eliminating the impact over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action; and e) compensating for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments.

No adverse impacts have been identified that would require compensatory mitigation.

7.0 COMPLIANCE WITH ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS AND REGULATIONS

Environmental compliance for the proposed action would be achieved upon: coordination of this draft EA and draft FONSI with appropriate agencies, organizations, and individuals for their review and comments; USFWS confirmation of Endangered Species Act compliance; receipt of a Water Quality Certificate from the State of Arkansas; public review of the Section 404(b)(1) Public Notice; date/signature of the Section 404(b)(1) Evaluation; receipt of the State Historic Preservation Officer Determination of No Effect on cultural resources; receipt and acceptance or resolution of all USFWS Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act recommendations; and receipt and acceptance or resolution of all Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality comments on the air quality impact analysis documented in the EA. The FONSI will not be signed until the proposed action achieves environmental compliance with applicable laws and regulations, as described above.

8.0 CONCLUSION

This office has assessed the environmental impacts of various project alternatives. No significant impacts to wildlife, wetlands, threatened and endangered species, cultural resources, socio-economic resources, environmental justice, air quality, water quality and hydrology, aquatic resources and fisheries, and HTRW are expected. There are no foreseen cumulative impacts that would have a significant negative impact on human health or the environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not warranted. Pending the results of the public review of this document, a FONSI would be prepared, if warranted.

9.0 PREPARED BY

This draft EA and the associated draft FONSI were prepared by Mike Thron, biologist, with cultural resources input provided by Dr. Robert Dunn, archaeologist. The address of the preparer

is: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Memphis District, Environmental Compliance Branch, Regional Planning and Environmental Division South, Attn: Mike Thron, 167 North Main St., B202, Memphis, TN 38103-1894.

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APPENDIX

Bendway Weir Typical Profile

Draft Section 404(b)(1) Evaluation

SECTION 404(b)(1) EVALUATION

Bendway Weir Construction – Mississippi River
At Barfield (River Mile 811R AHP),
Mississippi County, Arkansas

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

a. Location. The proposed bendway weir construction at Barfield is located along the right descending bank of the Mississippi River between River Miles 811R above head of passes (AHP) and 812R AHP in Mississippi County, Arkansas.

b. General Description. The work at Barfield (~ River Mile 811R AHP) will involve placement of approximately 560,000 tons of Graded Stone A in five bendway weirs. The bendway weirs will extend riverward from the right descending bank and vary from 600 to 1,100 feet in length. Crown widths of the weirs will be approximately 6 feet.

No bank grading or excavation of material will be required to tie the weirs into the riverbank. In order to ensure the integrity of each weir, rock paving consisting of Graded Stone C for a thickness of 3 feet would extend from approximately 200 feet upstream to approximately 200 feet downstream of each weir centerline where they tie into the bank totaling approximately 62,000 tons. The tops of all weirs would be constructed to an elevation of 30 feet below the Low Water Reference Plane (i.e. -30 LWRP). The LWRP is a computed water surface elevation profile based on low discharge statistics for a long period of daily gage records (i.e. the 97 percent exceedance discharge over a 20-year period of record). Thus, there would be at least 30 feet or more of water over the tops of the weirs even at low river stages to ensure safe navigation.

c. Authority and Purpose. The project is authorized by the Flood Control Act of 15 May 1928, Public Law No. 391-70, as amended and supplemented by subsequent Acts of Congress. This Act authorized the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) Project, which included channel improvement and stabilization works for stabilizing the channel to provide an efficient navigation alignment and protection of flood control features in the Lower Mississippi River. The purpose of this project is to create a safer navigation channel in the Mississippi River by reducing the strong drafting currents that presently exist.

d. General Description of Dredged and /or Fill Material.

(1) General Characteristics of Fill Material. Fill material will consist entirely of limestone rock. Graded Stone A will be used for construction of the weirs, and Graded Stone C will be used for bank stability upstream and downstream of each weir. Size requirements for Graded Stone A and Graded Stone C are shown below:

GRADED STONE A	
Stone Weight (LBS)	Cumulative % Finer by Weight
5000	100
2500	70-100
500	40-65
100	20-45
5	0-15
1	0-5

GRADED STONE C	
Stone Weight (LBS)	Cumulative % Finer by Weight
400	100
250	70-100
100	50-80
30	32-58
5	15-34
1	0-15

(2) Quantity of Material. The work at Barfield will involve placement of approximately 560,000 tons of Graded Stone A in five bendway weirs and placement of a total of approximately 62,000 tons of Graded Stone C for a thickness of 3 feet extending approximately 200 feet upstream and 200 feet downstream of the centerline of each weir.

(3) Source of Material. The Graded Stone A and Graded Stone C will be obtained from quarries producing stone which meets USACE specifications.

e. Description of Proposed Discharge Sites.

(1) Location. Five bendway weirs will be constructed at Barfield extending riverward from the right descending bank of the Mississippi River between River Miles 811R and 812R in Mississippi County, Arkansas.

(2) Size. The proposed bendway weirs will vary from approximately 600 to 1,100 feet in length with crown widths of approximately 6 feet.

(3) Type of Habitat. The bendway weirs will be placed in the swift currents along an outside bend in the lower Mississippi River. The weirs will tie into the existing revetted bank, will extend riverward along the primarily sand river bottom, and will remain at least 30 feet or more underwater even at low river stages.

(4) Timing and Duration of Discharge. The proposed construction would last approximately 90 days. Construction is typically conducted during the low water season extending from September through December.

f. Description of Disposal Method. Barge mounted draglines equipped with rock buckets will pull stone from floating barges into the river at the construction sites.

II. FACTUAL DETERMINATION

a. Physical Substrate Determinations.

(1) Substrate Elevation and Slope. There will be an immediate change in substrate elevation and slope over the areal extent of the structures. The bendway weirs will consist of a rock mound of uniform shape extending from the existing ACM along the outside bend into the

navigation channel. Sediment will be captured between the underwater weirs raising the channel depth along these outside bends; however, the elevation of the bendway weirs and associated trapped sediments will remain at a -30 LWRP allowing for passage of barge traffic even during low river stages. A small portion of the encroaching point bar will be removed as the currents shift away from the revetted bank along this outside bend.

(2) Sediment Type. The project sites are located entirely within the existing channel of the Mississippi River. The lower Mississippi River channel is comprised mainly of gravel, sands, silts, and clays. The stone used for the bendway weir construction will be Graded Stone A and Graded Stone C. Natural concentrations of stones these sizes are not typically found in the lower Mississippi River.

(3) Dredged and Fill Material Movement. No bank grading or excavation is required for the installation of the bendway weirs. Draglines will pull rock from floating barges into the river to construct the weirs. Extreme high flows may cause some potential scour and weir stone to be dislodged from the structures in the future resulting in a need for minor repairs; however, no major failures are likely to occur.

(4) Physical Effects on Benthos. Due to the high velocities and shifting substrate along the outside bend, few or no mussels are likely to inhabit the project locations or be affected by construction. The existing revetted bank are most likely colonized by high densities of hydropsychid caddisflies. Low densities of chironomids, oligochaetes, amphipods, and nematodes most likely inhabit the sandy substrate along the river bottom. During construction, many of the macroinvertebrates in the immediate vicinity of the project are expected to drift downstream. High densities of hydropsychid caddisflies would be expected to quickly colonize the large limestone rocks comprising the bendway weirs after construction. Benthic fish would temporarily shift upstream or downstream during construction. Greater utilization of the project locations by benthic fishes are expected after construction due to the expected increase in densities of macroinvertebrates.

(5) Other Effects. N/A

(6) Action Taken to Minimize Impacts. Construction of the bendway weirs will be carefully planned and executed. Contractors are required to maintain proper alignment of the weir structures. The fill material is clean limestone rock; thus, there will be minimal wash resulting from the placement of the stones. Contractors are also responsible for an approved environmental protection plan for the prevention/control of pollution and habitat disruption that may occur to the environment during construction.

b. Water Circulation, Fluctuation, and Salinity Determination.

(1) Water.

(a) Salinity. No effect.

(b) Water Chemistry. No expected change.

(c) Clarity. Some sediments (mostly sands) will be stirred up when the rocks comprising the bendway weirs are deposited onto the riverbed. This increased sediment load will be local and minor compared to the natural sediment load of the river, especially during high river stages. Due to the size of the receiving waters, no significant change in clarity is expected.

(d) Color. No expected change.

(e) Odor. No expected change.

(f) Taste. No expected change.

(g) Dissolved Gas Levels. No expected change.

(h) Nutrients. No expected change.

(i) Eutrophication. No expected change.

(j) Others as Appropriate. Not applicable.

(2) Current Patterns and Circulation.

(a) Current Patterns and Circulation. With the installation of the bendway weirs, secondary currents which are currently directed downward thus deepening the channel and depositing sediment onto the encroaching point bar will be redirected. The weirs would eventually remove a small part of the edge of the sand bar that is encroaching from across the river. This would widen the channel and reduce the swift currents along the toe of the revetted riverbank. Sediments will be deposited between the bendway weirs rather than building up on the encroaching point bar.

(b) Velocity. The bendway weirs will redirect the swift currents away from the outside riverbank allowing for a wider and safer navigation channel.

(c) Stratification. No expected change.

(d) Hydrologic Regime. No expected change.

(3) Normal Water Level Fluctuations. The bendway weirs will have no discernible effects on normal water level fluctuations or overall river stages.

(4) Salinity Gradients. Not applicable.

(5) Action Taken to Minimize Impacts. Construction of the bendway weirs will be carefully planned and executed. Contractors are required to maintain proper alignment of the weir structures. The fill material is clean limestone rock; thus, there will be minimal wash resulting from the placement of the stones. Contractors are also responsible for an approved

environmental protection plan for the prevention/control of pollution and habitat disruption that may occur to the environment during construction.

c. Suspended Particulate/Turbidity Determination.

(1) Expected Changes in suspended Particulates and Turbidity Levels in Vicinity of Disposal Sites. Some sediments (mostly sands) will be stirred up when the Graded Stone A and Graded Stone C are first deposited onto the riverbed and existing revetted bank. This increased sediment load will be local and minor compared to the natural sediment load of the river, especially during high river stages.

(2) Effects on Chemical and Physical Properties of the Water Column.

(a) Light Penetration. The temporary increase in turbidity during construction will be minor and not detectable from the surface. The proposed project will have no effect on light penetration.

(b) Dissolved Oxygen. No change is expected.

(c) Toxic Metals and Organics. No change is expected.

(d) Pathogens. No change is expected.

(e) Aesthetics. The bendway weirs will remain underwater at all times. A small portion of the encroaching point bars will be removed resulting in a wider navigation channel during low water stages. Overall, there would be no significant impacts to the aesthetics of the project area.

(f) Others as Appropriate. None are noted.

(3) Effects on Biota.

(a) Primary Production. The proposed work should have no distinguishable effects on primary productivity in the lower Mississippi River.

(b) Suspension/Filter Feeders. Due to the high velocities and shifting substrate along the outside bends, few or no freshwater mussels are likely to inhabit the project locations or be affected by construction. Some benthic macroinvertebrates inhabiting the river bottom and existing ACM along the outside bends may drift downstream as rock is being deposited. Benthic macroinvertebrates are expected to quickly colonize the stones comprising the bendway weirs after construction, particularly hydroptychid caddisflies.

(c) Sight Feeders. Resident fish are adapted to turbidity increases that occur with high water events. Project-related turbidity increases will be minor compared to these natural events. Since fish and other sight feeders are highly mobile, project impacts to sight-feeding organisms will be insignificant and short term.

(4) Actions Taken to Minimize Impacts. Construction of the bendway weirs will be carefully planned and executed. Contractors are required to maintain proper alignment of the weir structures. The fill material is clean limestone rock; thus, there will be minimal wash resulting from the placement of the stones. Contractors are also responsible for an approved environmental protection plan for the prevention/control of pollution and habitat disruption that may occur to the environment during construction.

d. Contaminant Determinations. It is not expected that any contaminants will be introduced or translocated due to construction.

e. Aquatic Ecosystems and Organism Determination.

(1) Effects on Plankton. Effects, if any, on plankton communities are expected to be insignificant and of short duration.

(2) Effects of Benthos. Due to the high velocities and shifting substrate along the outside bends, few or no mussels are likely to inhabit the project locations or be affected by construction. The existing revetted bank is most likely colonized by high densities of hydroptychid caddisflies. Low densities of chironomids, oligochaetes, amphipods, and nematodes most likely inhabit the sandy substrate along the river bottom. During construction, many of the macroinvertebrates in the immediate vicinity of the project are expected to drift downstream. High densities of hydroptychid caddisflies would be expected to quickly colonize the large limestone rocks comprising the bendway weirs after construction. Benthic fish would temporarily shift upstream or downstream during construction. Greater utilization of the project locations by benthic fishes are expected after construction due to the expected increase in densities of macroinvertebrates.

(3) Effects on Nekton. Nekton will be temporarily displaced during construction, but will return shortly after project completion. Greater utilization of this river reach by benthic fishes may occur after construction due to the expected increase in densities of hydroptychid caddisflies associated with the structures.

(4) Effects on Aquatic Food Web. Temporary reductions in benthic and suspension/filter communities and drift from such a small area should not significantly impact the aquatic food web. These organisms will quickly colonize the area after construction.

(5) Effects on Special Aquatic Sites.

(a) Sanctuaries and Aquatic Sites. Not applicable.

(b) Wetlands. There are no wetlands within the Mississippi River channel in the vicinity of the project. Thus, there would be no impacts to wetlands.

(c) Mud Flats. Not applicable.

(d) Vegetated Shallows. Not applicable.

(e) Riffle and Pool Complexes. None exist within the proposed project area.

(6) Threatened and Endangered Species. There are no sandbars or interior least tern nesting colonies along the outside bend where the underwater weirs would be installed. The sand point bar across the river channel from the proposed activities is a regularly used nesting colony in low river stages during the summer nesting season. Construction activities are expected to occur after least terns have fledged. However, if construction activities are required during active nesting, a deviation from the Channel Improvement Program - Best Management Practices (BMPs) would likely be needed since there is a potential to be within the 1,500-ft. seasonal distance buffer at this sharp river bend, in accordance with the 2013 Biological Opinion. Currents from the Mississippi River scour and move sandbars around each year. This is a natural occurrence to which the least tern is adapted. The small portion of the point bar that will eventually erode once the weirs are installed is expected to be less than 15 percent of the entire area of this large sandbar. The sandbar would still contain ample least tern nesting area following project construction. Overall, any adverse effects of the proposed bendway weir construction to least terns would be localized and any redistribution of sediments downstream would result in little loss of overall habitat quantity. Although no pallid sturgeon have been collected in the immediate vicinity of the project area, they could utilize the revetted bank, main channel, and channel border in the vicinity of the project area. The channel border along the edge of the sandbar across from the project area would shift towards the opposite river bank after installation of the bendway weirs. Spawning sites have not yet been documented on the LMR, but spawning is suspected to occur on gravel bars. No gravel bars will be impacted by the proposed work. As referenced in the 2013 Biological Opinion, BMPs include construction activity restrictions during the potential spawning period of the pallid sturgeon from 1 April – 30 June for this activity. Work is not expected to occur between 1 April and 30 June. If construction would extend between 1 April and 30 June, a request to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for deviation from the BMPs would be required, in accordance with the Biological Opinion. Overall, no significant adverse impacts to pallid sturgeon are expected due to the proposed actions. As noted in the 2013 USFWS Biological Opinion, bendway weir construction may have some local benefits to pallid sturgeon by providing current velocity shelters behind each weir and increased fish forage potential. The proposed project is part of the Channel Improvement Program for the MR&T Project. The potential for adverse effects on the interior least tern, pallid sturgeon, and fat pocketbook mussel resulting from this program, including bendway weir construction, are addressed in the 2013 formal consultation with the USFWS, pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), as amended (USACE 2013, USFWS 2013, Killgore et al. 2014). The proposed activities were presented at past annual partnering meetings with the USFWS, and no special conditions were identified for this proposed item of work. Requirements of Section 7 of the ESA have been fulfilled. However, obligations under Section 7 of the ESA will be reconsidered if new information reveals that the proposed action may affect listed species in a manner or to an extent not previously considered, the proposed action is subsequently modified to include activities which were not considered during this review, or new species are listed or critical habitat designated that might be affected by the proposed action.

(7) Other Wildlife. Since all work would be done from barges floating in the river, there would be no significant adverse impacts to terrestrial wildlife. A bald eagle nest is located approximately 800 feet upstream from the most upstream weir location. All construction activities would be from floating barges in the water and would exceed the recommended 660-ft. buffer from the bald eagle nest located upstream. Additionally, construction is expected to occur in late summer and fall after bald eagle young have fledged minimizing the potential for any adverse impacts.

(8) Actions Taken to Minimize Impacts. Construction of the bendway weirs will be carefully planned and executed. Contractors are required to maintain proper alignment of the weir structures. The fill material is clean limestone rock; thus, there will be minimal wash resulting from the placement of the stones. Contractors are also responsible for an approved environmental protection plan for the prevention/control of pollution and habitat disruption that may occur to the environment during construction. A 660-ft. buffer would be maintained from the proposed activities to the bald eagle nest located upstream if activities are required prior to fledging.

f. Proposed Disposal Site Determinations.

(1) Mixing Zone Determination. Stones would be deposited to a depth exceeding 30 feet. Water velocities are expected to be approximately 5-8 feet per second. Flow direction is generally downstream, although localized eddy currents may be present in some locations. Natural turbulence is characteristic of the lower Mississippi River. Stratification would not occur as a result of the proposed activities. The proposed activities would take place over approximately 90 days. Minor increases in sediment load would be expected with the proposed activities; however, any increases in turbidity would be transitory and minor compared to the natural sediment load of the river, especially during high river stages.

(2) Compliance with Applicable Water Quality Standards. Section 401 water quality certification has been requested from the State of Arkansas.

(3) Potential Effects on Human Use Characteristics.

(a) Municipal and Private Water Supply. No change is expected.

(b) Recreational and Commercial Fishing. Fishing should not be affected by the proposed work.

(c) Water Related Recreation. No change is expected.

(d) Aesthetics. The bendway weirs will remain underwater at all times; thus, no changes are expected.

(e) Parks, National Historical Monuments, National Seashore, Wilderness Areas, Research Sites and Similar Preserves. No sites exist within the footprint of the proposed project.

g. Determination of Cumulative Effects on the Aquatic Ecosystem. The Lower Mississippi River has been converted from a naturally meandering river channel of the past to a more controlled channel containing various river training structures and other navigation and flood control features that are present today. Following the disastrous flood of 1927, the Flood Control Act of 1928 was passed committing the Federal Government to a definite program of flood control, channel stabilization, and river regulation, known as the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) Project. The MR&T project has four major features: 1) levees and floodwalls for flood protection, 2) floodways to divert excess flows past critical reaches, 3) channel improvement and stabilization for both navigation and flood control, and 4) tributary basin improvements for flood protection and drainage. The MR&T project is primarily responsible for the physical, hydraulic, and ecological features that presently exist in the Lower Mississippi River. The primary environmental effects of the MR&T project and channel improvement activities include the physical loss of channel habitat quantity, a growing disconnect with the relict floodplain during low to moderate river stages, and a general loss of riverine habitat complexity. Construction of the existing MR&T project has continued throughout ensuing years and will continue throughout the near future. Dikes, revetments, and bendway weirs found throughout the Lower Mississippi River have resulted in a mosaic of artificial and natural habitats utilized by aquatic organisms and wildlife. The construction of these bendway weirs will add to this mosaic of habitats. Maintenance dredging and construction and maintenance of channel improvement structures on the lower Mississippi River, as part of the MR&T program, are conducted annually. Ongoing construction in the vicinity of the proposed project area includes the placement of articulated concrete mattress on top of the existing damaged revetment for a length of approximately 2,600 feet along the bank in and adjacent to the proposed project area. The proposed bendway weirs at the project location would result in the addition of permanently inundated rock substrates at this outside bend adding to the mosaic of artificial and natural habitats of the lower Mississippi River. The extent of the encroaching sand point bar located across the channel from the project location would be slightly reduced after construction resulting in a wider navigation channel. The preferred alternative would result in some minor alterations to the environment; however, no significant adverse cumulative impacts are expected due to the proposed action.

h. Determination of Secondary Effects on the Aquatic Ecosystem. No significant adverse secondary effects are anticipated beyond those discussed above in Section II.

III. FINDING OF COMPLIANCE FOR MISSISSIPPI RIVER BENDWAY WEIR CONSTRUCTION AT BARFIELD

- a. No significant adaptations of the Section 404(b)(1) guidelines were made relative to this evaluation.
- b. The purpose of this project is to create a safer navigation channel in the Mississippi River by reducing the strong drafting currents that presently exist. Continued towboat navigation through this hazardous Mississippi River bend increases the risk of an accident. Barges could break loose and block safe navigation of the river. Some barges could sink. If hazardous or toxic

materials are involved, serious concerns for public safety could arise. Adverse environmental impacts could also incur.

c. Section 401 water quality certification was requested from the State of Arkansas.

d. The proposed project is part of the Channel Improvement Program for the MR&T Project. The potential for adverse effects on the interior least tern, pallid sturgeon, and fat pocketbook mussel resulting from this program, including bendway weir construction, are addressed in the 2013 formal consultation with the USFWS, pursuant to Section 7 of the ESA. The proposed activities are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the interior least tern, pallid sturgeon, and fat pocketbook mussel. The USFWS has been coordinated with, and requirements of Section 7 of the ESA have been fulfilled. However, obligations under Section 7 of the ESA will be reconsidered if new information reveals that the proposed action may affect listed species in a manner or to an extent not previously considered, the proposed action is subsequently modified to include activities which were not considered during this review, or new species are listed or critical habitat designated that might be affected by the proposed action.

e. The proposed work will not significantly affect human health and welfare, the municipal water supply, or commercial or sport fishing. No long-term impacts on plankton communities; breeding, spawning, or nursery habitats; or shellfish areas are expected. There are no wetlands present in the un-vegetated Mississippi River channel; however, it is still considered waters of the United States and subject to Clean Water Act regulations. No other special aquatic sites are located in the proposed work areas.

f. No significant adverse impacts to aquatic life or terrestrial wildlife, dependent on aquatic ecosystems, are expected.

g. The proposed work should not cause significant adverse impacts on ecosystem diversity, productivity, or stability.

h. No adverse impacts on recreational, aesthetic, or economic values are anticipated. The proposed work would create a safer navigation channel in the Mississippi River.

i. Construction of the bendway weirs will be carefully planned and executed. Contractors are required to maintain proper alignment of the weir structures. The fill material is clean limestone rock; thus, there will be minimal wash resulting from the placement of the stones. Contractors are also responsible for an approved environmental protection plan for the prevention/control of pollution and habitat disruption that may occur to the environment during construction. A 660-ft. buffer would be maintained from the proposed activities to the bald eagle nest located upstream if activities are required prior to fledging.

j. Pursuant to 36 CFR 800.3(a)(1), the District Archaeologist has determined that this project has no potential to cause effects to historic properties eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Thus, no further Section 106 (National Historic Preservation Act) consultation is required. However, if prehistoric or historic artifacts, human bones, or other archaeological materials subject to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) are

found during construction, all activities would cease immediately in that area and the Memphis District Archaeologist would be contacted. State Historic Preservation Office and tribal NAGPRA representatives, the local sheriff, etc., would be contacted as required by state and federal law.

Date: _____

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