

**DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
(FONSI)**

**Below Piggott and Big Island Seepage Remediation
St. Francis River Basin
Clay and Greene Counties, Arkansas**

Description of the Proposed Action

The proposed project involves implementing two seepage control measures along the St. Francis Levee in Clay and Greene counties, Arkansas. Project features include the construction of landside berms and modification of existing ditches to accommodate drainage (Figures 2 - 4). Access to the project area would be from county roads or from roads on top of the levee. Heavy construction equipment would be used to modify and fill the existing ditches and construct berms. Post-construction hydrology would be similar to pre-existing conditions for both proposed projects.

Below Piggott

The proposed project reach/area is approximately 9.5 miles long, extending from just north of U.S. Highway 90 south along the existing St. Francis River levee. Proposed berms would be between approximately 150 – 300 feet wide, depending on location. However, berms would not be required along the entirety of the 9.5-mile project reach, as seepage concerns in some areas would be addressed through ditch modification or creation. Throughout the 9.5-mile project reach, existing ditches would be filled and new ditches constructed approximately 170 feet from the existing levee toe (Figure 1).

Approximately 1,032,000 cubic yards of spoil material from previous maintenance activities on the St. Francis River would be utilized for borrow material (Below Highway 90 Channel Maintenance Cleanout). However, approximately 0.2 acres of trees would be required to be cleared to establish access to the borrow source. This clearing is added to the overall project mitigation requirements. The borrow area identified is riverside of the proposed project area.

Big Island

The proposed project reach/area is approximately 2.5 miles long, extending from U.S. Highway 412 south along the existing Big Slough levee. Two berms, approximately 2,500 and 1,000 feet long and approximately 150 feet wide, are proposed. As the case with the Below Piggott reach, existing ditches would be filled and new ditches constructed (Figure 2). Borrow is proposed to be obtained from a 40-acre cleared agricultural field riverside of the existing levee approximately 1.5 miles south of project reach/area. However, unlike the Below Piggott portion, proposed work at Big Island would be split into two phases. Phase I would consist of the major portion of the 2,500-foot berm (the approximate lower half of the project reach) and would be truncated at the property line of the downstream landowner. Additionally, to preserve current hydrology, Phase I would be designed to receive existing runoff, as well as anticipated runoff from Phase II work to the north, which would consist of the remaining 1.25 miles of the project reach. Upon completion of construction activities, the levee would be re-graveled from the borrow location north to Highway 412. Please note that finalized design plans for Phase II are

not yet complete, but contain enough details to calculate potential environmental impacts. Anticipated impacts based on Phase II preliminary designs have been estimated and accounted for in this EA's impact assessment and mitigation recommendations. If the Phase II design changes significantly from current design or requires additional mitigation, this EA will be updated to reflect the new design and mitigation requirements and re-submitted for public review.

Factors Considered in This Determination

This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared specifically to assess the potential impacts of this work on cultural and natural resources, including endangered species, water quality, infrastructure, wildlife habitat, and to update coordination with the associated levee work. The EA revealed that the proposed project action was the least costly and the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative. The environmental assessment and associated investigations found that no significant immitigable impacts would be anticipated to cultural resources, wetlands, or threatened or endangered species.

Mitigation

With the implementation of the proposed project, approximately 6.7 acres of bottomland hardwood (BLH) and 19.8 acres of Waters of the U.S. (farmed wetlands) are anticipated to be impacted. The farmed wetland impacts would be mitigated at a 1:1 ratio with the 6.7 acres of BLH impacts mitigated at a 3:1 ratio for a total of 39.9 acres of BLH restoration required for both projects. Several properties have been suggested for mitigation and would provide sufficient acreage to meet mitigation requirements. A mitigation team consisting of members from U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission has reviewed the properties and have deemed the properties to be suitable for mitigation. However, final fee purchase of the proposed mitigation property has not been completed, so a mitigation plan has not been finalized. This mitigation plan would be finalized with input from all team members and implemented concurrently with project construction.

Public Involvement

The proposed action has been coordinated with appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies, federally recognized tribes, businesses, organizations, and individuals through distribution of the draft EA, *Below Piggott and Big Island Seepage Remediation, St. Francis River Basin, Clay and Greene Counties, Arkansas*, for their review and comment.

Conclusion

This office has assessed the potential environmental impacts of the proposed action. Based on this assessment, and a review of the public comments made on the associated environmental assessment, a determination has been made that the proposed action would have no significant impact on the human environment. Therefore, a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared.

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Date

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