

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

Waitsburg Levee Rehabilitation

City of Waitsburg Walla Walla County, Washington

July 2018

I. Project Description and Background Information

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Walla Walla District (Corps), proposes to repair a portion of the levee along the Touchet River in Waitsburg, Washington (City). The levee was damaged during a high water event during the 2017 flood season.

The Touchet River near Waitsburg experienced a significant flood event during the 2017 flood season. The flooding caused erosion damage along the levee. If the levee is not repaired, more erosion of the levee would occur and ultimately lead to a breach. It has been estimated that an event as small as a 50-year flood could generate enough erosion that it would lead to a breach and flooding of downtown Waitsburg. Whereas, if the levee is repaired to its original design, the levee at this location could withstand nearly a 200-year flood event.

On March 28, 2017, the City requested assistance from the Corps, to repair the damage to the levee under Public Law 84-99, Flood and Coastal Storm Emergency Act. Under this law, the Chief of Engineers, acting for the Secretary of the Army, is authorized to undertake activities including rehabilitation of flood control works threatened or destroyed by flood. In response to the City's request, the Corps prepared a "Rehabilitation Project Information Report for the Waitsburg Levee" which was determined acceptable by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Northwestern Division on December 4, 2017.

II. Proposed Action

Under the proposed action, the Corps would repair the 55-foot damaged section of the levee to the as-was condition by re-constructing the portion that eroded away and building a riprap buttress at the upstream end of the levee to armor and protect the levee tie-in point.

III. Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed action is to provide flood risk management to affected areas of the City. Rehabilitation would include repairing the levee to the "as-was condition" in a manner that would not change the character, scope, or size of the original fill design. The action is needed because the levee protects nearby homes,

agricultural land, and municipal facilities that are now at increased risk from flood damages.

IV. Project Alternatives

Two alternatives are evaluated in the Environmental Assessment (EA). The No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action Alternative. The statutory objectives/scheme supporting an action can serve as a guide to determine the reasonableness of objectives outlined in the EA – in this case assistance under PL 84-99. Additionally, an agency's obligation to consider alternatives under an EA is a lesser one than under an Environmental Impact Statement. Consequently, only the No Action and Proposed Action Alternatives were analyzed further. The No Action Alternative does not satisfy the project's purpose and need, but the National Environmental Policy Act requires analysis of the No Action Alternative to set the baseline from which to compare other alternatives. No Action does not mean there would be no environmental impacts from this alternative.

V. Environmental Effects

The Proposed Action Alternative and the No Action Alternative were analyzed for potential effects to the following resources: water quality, aquatic resources, wildlife, vegetation, threatened and endangered species, cultural resources, soils, socioeconomics, and effects of climate change. This analysis is detailed in Section 3 of the EA. The analysis concluded there would be no significant adverse effects to any of the resources from implementation of the Proposed Action Alternative.

The Corps also considered the cumulative effects of the Proposed Action Alternative along with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the Waitsburg area. The Corps concluded that repair of the levee would not cause a significant cumulative effect.

VI. Consultation and Compliance with Other Laws and Regulations

Potential effects to threatened and endangered species were analyzed in the "*Waitsburg Levee Rehabilitation Assistance Project Biological Assessment*" (BA) prepared by the Corps in March 2018. The Corps determined that this project "may affect, and is likely to adversely affect" Middle Columbia River steelhead and Columbia River Basin bull trout. The Corps also determined that this project would result in no take of species listed under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, no disturbance or take under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, no effect to yellow-billed cuckoo, and no effect on essential fish habitat pursuant to section 305(b) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Corps requested formal consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on March 9, 2018 and received a Biological Opinion on June 21, 2018. The Corps also requested formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on March 12, 2018 and received a

Biological Opinion on May 29, 2018. The Corps will implement all of the terms and conditions presented in the Biological Opinions.

The Corps has determined that this action, as proposed, would result no adverse effect to historic properties. The Washington State Historic Preservation Office concurred with the Corps finding in a letter dated June 20, 2018.

In accordance with the Corps supplemental NEPA regulations (33 CFR §230.11), the Corps will provide notice of the availability of the EA and this FONSI when signed to concerned agencies, organizations and the interested public by a news release issued to all area news agencies. The EA and signed FONSI will also be posted to the Corps website at <http://www.nww.usace.army.mil/Missions/Environmental-Compliance/>.

A summary of environmental commitments outlined in the BA and Biological Opinions is provided in the Environmental Green Sheet (Appendix A). See Section 4 of the EA for a discussion of how the proposed action complies with other laws, regulations, and Executive Orders.

VII. Findings and Decision

Having reviewed the Waitsburg Levee Rehabilitation Project EA and supporting appendices, I find that the documents provide sufficient discussions on the purpose of and need for the proposed action, alternatives, the environmental effects of the proposed action and the alternatives, and a listing of agencies consulted. These documents provide sufficient evidence and analysis to meet the Corps requirements pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. Based on this information, I find that implementation of the proposed action would not result in significant impacts on the quality of the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. The Corps will proceed to fund the proposed project under the authority of Public Law 84-99, Flood and Coastal Storm Emergency Act, when funds are made available for that purpose.



DAMON A. DELAROSA
Lieutenant Colonel, EN
Commanding

7/9/18
Date

