

December 3, 2013

## **SUMMARY OF THE DEEPENING & DREDGING PROJECT FOR THE INTRACOASTAL WATERWAY (IWW) IN PALM BEACH COUNTY (VICINITY OF PEANUT ISLAND)**

(USACE FILE NO. SAJ-2012-01719 (SP-SLR), FDEP FILE NO. 50-0294306-002)

**ISSUE.** Existing depths in the IWW segment in the vicinity of Peanut Island, part of the federally authorized channel, are currently permitted to -10 feet (ft) Mean Low Water (MLW). The proposed 0.66 mile project currently requests deepening the channel to -15 ft MLW (with an allowable -2 ft overdredge to achieve and maintain project depth) and placing the dredged material in the adjacent 17-acre FIND-owned Dredged Material Management Area on Peanut Island. However, after nearly a year and a half of permitting efforts, the October 17, 2013 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Request for Additional Information (RAI) requested FIND consider reducing the project depth to -13 ft MLW.

**BACKGROUND & JUSTIFICATION.** The proposed project need originates from an increased number of larger vessels that require a deeper channel for safe navigation and the location of facilities within the project template that service these vessels (Rybovich, Viking Yachts, City of Riviera Beach Marina) or require the additional operational depth (Lockheed Martin). Based on an April 2011 economic analysis of local city, county, and industry groups, implementation of the currently proposed project — deepening 0.66 mile of the 5.2 miles of the original project length — would result in significant annual benefits of: *\$7.3 million for servicing 160 – 180 ft Loa (length overall) vessels (that draft in excess of 10 ft), \$73.7 million for vessels up to 180 – 240 ft Loa, and \$185.3 million for vessels up to 240 – 280 ft Loa.*

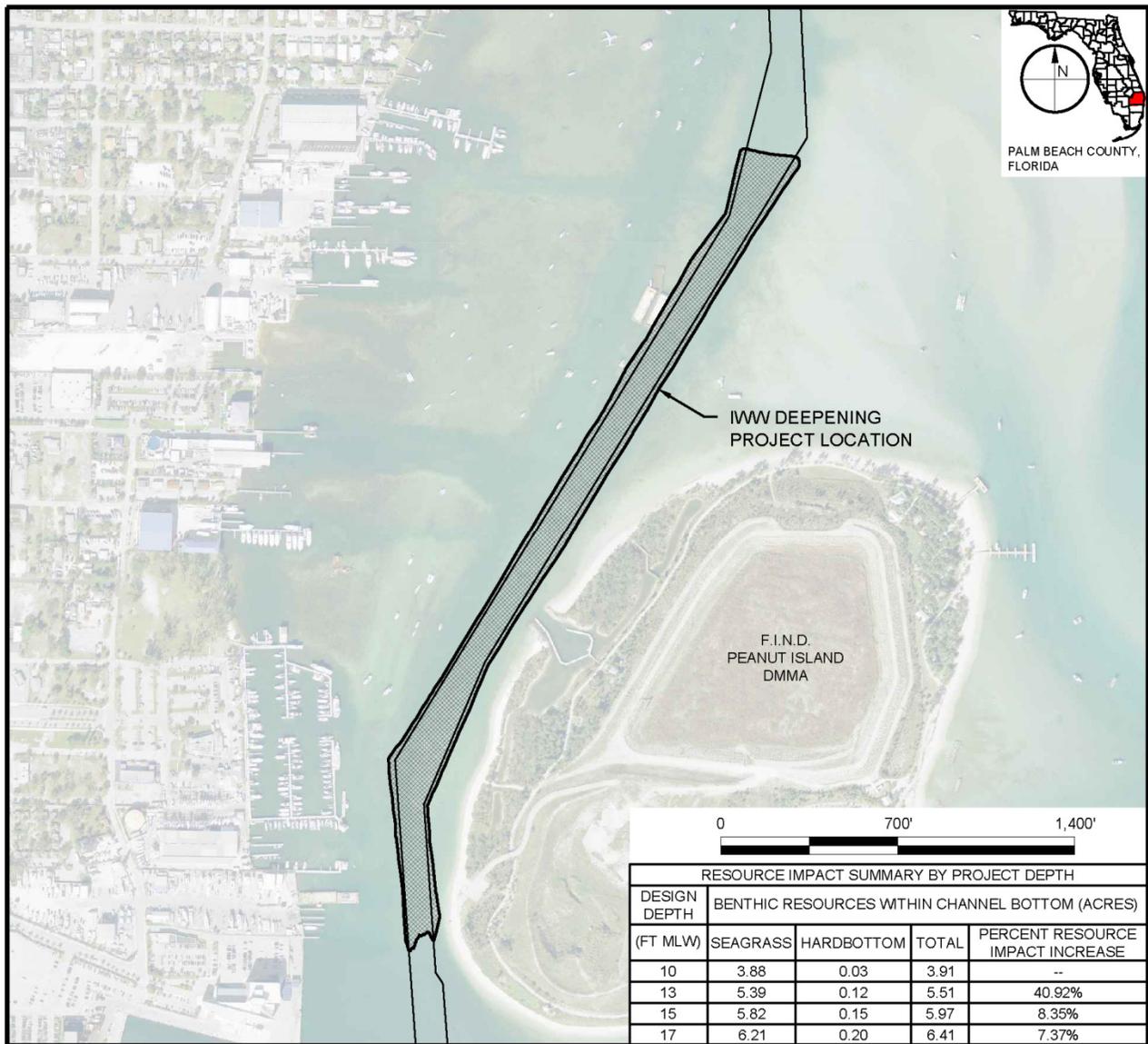
Based on vessel design drafts, projected future growth, and industry trends described in the 2011 analysis, and to capture the full economic benefit associated with these vessels, engineering guidelines suggest a channel between -17 ft and -20 ft MLW. However, to avoid and minimize environmental impacts (see below), FIND has agreed to reduce its requested channel depth to -15 ft MLW and width to 100 ft (from the federally authorized 125 ft). Limiting the channel depth further would greatly reduce the channel functionality and associated economic benefits, as well as position the project to be unsuccessful and obsolete prior to construction.

**AVOIDANCE & MINIMIZATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS.** The original economic study indicated that the ideal channel depth would range between -17 ft and -20 ft MLW. The initial permitting process (June 2012) resulted in a depth reduction to -17 ft MLW. In an effort to further reduce environmental impacts and maintain safe navigation, FIND reduced the requested depth (in its August 2013 response to a USACE RAI) to -15 ft MLW. This modification to the proposed project depth matches the 2001 USACE Detailed Project Report recommendation. The change also reduced the overall seagrass impacts from 6.78 acres to 5.82 acres and the hardbottom impacts from 0.22-acre to 0.15-acre.

The USACE has recently indicated that a depth greater than -13 ft MLW may require an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). However, technical data counters that the currently proposed project includes a fraction of the original project length (0.66 mile vs. 5.2 miles) and results in significantly less seagrass impacts (5.82 acres vs. 31.01 acres) than listed in the 2001 USACE Detailed Project Report. Figure 1 provides a plan view of the proposed project and a tabular summary of seagrass and hardbottom impacts for four alternative project depths. The figure shows a minimal (i.e., 0.46-acre or 8.35%) increase in IWW channel impacts between the -13 ft and -15 ft MLW project. Notably, most of these contemplated submerged natural resource impacts would occur during any approved, routine maintenance dredging event required to restore the channel to its current -10 ft MLW design.

**RECOMMENDATION.** FIND conducted a teleconference with the USACE on November 19, 2013 to discuss the overall project need and relay its objections to the USACE’s suggestion to consider a shallower design depth or extend the project timeline through an EIS. FIND strongly believes that the reduced project footprint from 5.2 miles (2001 USACE Detailed Project Report) to 0.66-mile (proposed project), reduced seagrass impacts (from 31.01 acres to 5.82 acres), and provision of the previously provided avoidance and minimization analysis do not justify an EIS for this project. Secondly, most of the proposed resource impacts would occur during routine IWW maintenance dredging events. The benthic resource impacts between a maintenance dredging event (i.e., -10 ft MLW) and the proposed project depth (-15 ft MLW) would result in a net increase of only 1.94 acres of seagrass and 0.12-acre hardbottom impact. Rather than constructing a project depth that would result in a short-term solution and limited economic benefit to the area (-13 ft MLW project), FIND is committed to providing the optimum project (-15 ft MLW project) for the long-term success of the area at a minimal increase in environmental resource impacts.

**PROJECT MAP.**



**Figure 1.** FIND IWW Deepening Project in vicinity of the Port of Palm Beach