



US Army Corps
of Engineers
St. Paul District

Information Paper

Regulatory Program: Aggregate Industries, Nelson Mine Expansion, Grey Cloud Island, Cottage Grove, Minnesota

Contact

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Location/Description

Aggregate Industries is proposing to dredge and process sand and gravel in approximately 230 acres of a backwater area adjacent to the main channel of the Mississippi River at Grey Cloud Island in Washington County, Minnesota. Processed granular material would be used as aggregate for concrete. A berm would be constructed in the river upstream of the mine area to minimize current velocity and reduce turbidity. An electric clamshell dredge would excavate sand and gravel to a depth of approximately 200 feet. Dredged material would be transported via conveyor from the dredge to an existing processing plant on Grey Cloud Island. Processed aggregate would then be barged to upstream facilities in St. Paul and to a facility located above Upper St. Anthony Falls in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Excess sand not used for berm construction or concrete aggregate would be returned to the mined area. The project area is within the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, between Mississippi River Miles 820 and 821 in Mississippi River Pool 2.

Background/Discussion

The existing Nelson Mine began operations in the 1950's. It has approximately 7 years of sand and gravel reserves. Aggregate Industries has delineated a sand and gravel deposit located in a backwater area of the Mississippi River that was above water prior to the construction of Lock and Dam 2 in the 1930's. The proposed expansion to the backwater area would extend mining operations on the site another 20 years using its existing processing facilities and barge transportation system. Aggregate Industries has estimated the project would impact 230 acres of primarily limnetic and deep marsh wetlands. Direct impacts would include the excavation and redeposition of dredged material. The project would result in a conversion of the mine area from a shallow backwater to a deep water habitat area.

Status

The Corps and the city of Cottage Grove are conducting a joint environmental impact statement (EIS) for the project. Barr Engineering is the third-party EIS contractor. A Notice of Intent to conduct an EIS for the project was published in the Federal Register on May 14, 2008. Scoping was completed and a preliminary draft EIS was reviewed by cooperating agencies in September 2010.

Consultation invitations were sent to 21 Native American tribes, the State Historic Preservation Office, the Office of the State Archaeologist, and the National Park Service. Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on potential impacts to federally-listed threatened and endangered species (Higgins' eye pearl mussel) has been requested. The U.S. Coast Guard has been invited to consult on navigation issues.

Aggregate Industries is evaluating the economic feasibility of the project as it develops an acceptable mitigation plan that meets Federal and State compensatory mitigation requirements. The lead agencies are awaiting a detailed mitigation plan for the proposed project. Island construction in lower Pool 2 is the preferred mitigation type, and location, for proposed project impacts. Construction and long-term maintenance costs, commercial transportation restrictions if locks are closed to navigation in the future, and escrow/financial assurance costs are being considered. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources floodplain restrictions in Pool 2 may limit the areal extent of berm and island construction. A public notice for the Section 10/404 permit application will be issued when the draft EIS is made available for public comment. The final EIS will be the basis for the permit decision.

Authority

The Corps has regulatory authority over the proposed project based on Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899, and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act of 1977.