

Big Lake Public Meeting
August 29, 2022
Wabasha-Kellogg High School
Wabasha, MN

Public questions and comments following formal presentation.

1. General complaint about work and resulting conditions in Weaver Bottoms. Unclear what this was referencing, or even “who” did “what” work that was in question in Weaver Bottoms.

Response: No response currently as it’s unclear what the issue was, and Weaver Bottoms is in Pool 5 and not a part of this project.

2. How deep will you dredge in indicated areas? Are you (USACE) going to channelize Catfish Slough? Will it lead to sand deposition in lower Big Lake?

Response: Dredging depths aren’t known exactly at this point. For areas where construction access is needed, it’s likely construction access channel would be dredged to at least 6 feet of depth at low control pool elevation (e.g., low summer flows). Depending on dredging depths and river conditions in the years following dredging, it’s possible there could be an increase in deposition in lower Big Lake. It’s likely the dredged access channels will “trap” at least some of this sand before it enters lower Big Lake. However, we will keep this concern in mind and try to minimize potential for increased sand deposition in Big Lake. It is critical to realize that sand deposition will continue in Big Lake without the project. We will try to reduce the risk of this sedimentation increasing as a result of the project.

3. Why is there no consideration for recreational navigation? Why can you not dredge to improve recreational navigation?

Response: The authority and funds used for these projects are specific for habitat improvement. We generally can’t do features that are solely for recreational benefit. We can consider features that have multiple benefits (e.g., habitat benefits and recreational benefits).

4. Will dredging the backwater area behind Teepeeota Point be filled in by dredged material from the existing dredged material placement site?

Response: This can be monitored during the feasibility study. If there is evidence of sand depositing from the placement site into the backwater area (i.e., sluffing of material), the team can consider and implement strategies to ensure this does not affect the longevity of the backwater dredging.

5. Why are you not dredging through the middle of Big Lake?

Response: Conversations with resource agency partners did not identify a habitat need or benefit by dredging through the middle of Big Lake. Likewise, we do not need that area for construction access. This was identified by the resource agencies as an area to avoid as a part of our construction efforts.

6. Why are you avoiding the duck refuge? Does the layout of project features block access to Big Lake?

Response: The areas we are avoiding were identified by the natural resource agency partners. They did not support project features within Big Lake proper. The project would not block access to Big Lake.

7. Where will material come from to make floodplain forest features?

Response: Floodplain forest features are made up of a sand material base and fine material topsoil layer. Most of the sand and fine material will come from dredging from the project area. Depending on the quantity and make-up of that material, additional sand could be obtained from one of the temporary dredged material placement sites on the river (e.g., the Teepeota placement site). The location and amount of dredging will be determined in the next 6-12 months as we look at how much material we need, and the make up of that material from the proposed dredge cuts.

8. Do you plan for the resilience of new islands from flooding?

Response: Yes. Island elevations are selected carefully based on where we see quality floodplain forest habitat in near-by areas as well as historic water levels. We first look at what elevation certain river forest species (e.g., swamp white oak) are found to be growing well in the project area. We then look at how often that elevation is inundated or flooded (i.e., "inundation frequency"). Finally, we choose the target elevations for forest habitat features, based on how often they would be inundated in the project area and the existing thriving floodplain forest elevations. We make sure to consider the reality that river discharges have been trending higher in recent years and constructing our islands or floodplain forest areas slightly higher to account for these changes. A climate assessment is completed to inform this consideration.

9. Will you dredge out Indian Slough adjacent to the historical habitat project?

Response: The Indian Slough HREP was constructed in the 1990s. Currently USACE is not planning to dredge out the Indian Slough project area as a feature of this project. Conceptual project features in the Truedale Lake area may require access dredging in Indian Slough.

10. Is this lake a tradeoff of duck habitat for fish habitat? Truedale Lake was one area with this concern.

Response: Habitat type tradeoffs can and do happen with some project features. While it's not a conscious effort to "trade ducks for fish," favoring one habitat type over another can and would result in different species and social uses. The project objectives focus on improving certain habitat types (e.g., floodplain forest and backwater fish), and will be developed to avoid and minimize adverse effects on other environmental resources and/or habitats (e.g., diving ducks or other waterfowl).

11. What do you accomplish by placing sand? Isn't this moving sand from one place to another?

Response: Sand or granular material is used to create the foundational base of the floodplain forest/island features. These features are then capped with topsoil to seed and plant tree species on the features. That granular material would come from a combination of the access dredging locations, backwater dredging locations and adjacent dredged material placement sites.

12. How do you address the risk of flooding during construction?

Response: Flooding is always a risk during construction. Additionally, project features are most vulnerable before vegetation (seeding and planting) establishment. We try to minimize that risk by carefully choosing our feature target elevations. The target elevations take into consideration the number of times these elevations are inundated or overtopped during a construction season. Higher target elevations result in less frequent inundation periods. While this reduces the risk, inundation of project features cannot be avoided entirely. Flooding/inundation risk is a major factor we consider when we determine how “constructable” a project is.