

Notes for March 13, 2024
Southern California Dredged Material Management Team (SC-DMMT) Off-Cycle Meeting
US Army Corps of Engineers - Los Angeles District (5 pages)

Attendance (WebEx):

Stephen Estes (Corps Regulatory)
Lia Protopapadakis F. (Corps Regulatory)
Larry Smith (Corps Planning)
Allen Ota (USEPA)
Chris Dellith (USFWS)
Bryant Chesney (NOAA NMFS)
Valerie Vartanian (US Navy)
Jeremy Smith (CCC)
Leslie Hart (CDFW)
John Ota (California State Parks)
Kelly Connor (California State Lands Commission)
Rosi Dagit (Resource Conservation District of Santa Monica Mountains)
Jamie King (Resource Conservation District of Santa Monica Mountains)
Chris Webb (Moffatt and Nichol)
Christopher O'Day (Moffatt and Nichol)
Weixia Jin (Moffatt and Nichol)
Chris Osuch (Anchor QEA)
Megan Collins (Anchor QEA)

Project #1: 1:00 – 1:45 PM

1. Project Name: Topanga Lagoon Restoration Project
2. Applicant's name & affiliation: Chris Webb, Moffatt & Nichol, Rosi Dagit, RCDSMM
3. Project Type: Regulatory
4. Corps project manager who will attend: Lia Protopapadakis F.
5. Purpose/topic: SAPR
6. Request for suitability determination? (y/n): Yes
7. Documents provided (emailed or DOD SAFE FTP link): Documents will be emailed to the SC-DMMT distribution list on 3/6 or 3/7.
8. Time needed (15, 30, 45 min?): 45 minutes

In an email prior to the meeting, Melissa Scianni (USEPA) concurred that the materials are suitable for unconfined aquatic disposal. She noted, however, that the mercury concentrations were quite a bit higher than usual in Southern California. The levels are more typical of what we would expect in San Francisco Bay, Newport Bay, or other areas impacted by legacy mercury issues. The concentrations were not elevated enough for USEPA to disagree with aquatic placement, but they were notable. In addition, there are still ongoing questions about the exact placement location, hence the mounding study. While USEPA defers to the other agencies to evaluate the impacts from the proposed placement, it is important that the placement location serve some purpose other than disposal of the excavated material. The MPRSA regulates disposal of wastes into the ocean, including dredged material. Disposal of dredged material into the ocean for a stated project purpose (e.g., beach/littoral cell nourishment, habitat restoration,

shoreline protection, etc.) can be permitted under section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Therefore, if placement of the excavated material serves no purpose other than disposal of unneeded sediment, then that would be a MPRSA regulated disposal and the material could only be taken to one of the USEPA designated disposal sites (LA-2, LA-3, or LA-5 ODMDS).

Allan Ota (USEPA)- When you refer to “mound sediment,” are you referring to the material in the lagoon?

Weixia Jin (Moffatt and Nichol)- Yes, it is the lagoon material at the green dots where the cores are located. It will be in a mound when we place it in the nearshore. There is a higher concentration of cobbles and coarser sediment closer to shore. The maximum sediment volume would be 256,000 cubic yards discharged over the course of approximately five months.

Jeremy Smith (CCC)- For both the one-year and five-year post-construction figures, what is the baseline?

Weixia Jin (Moffatt and Nichol)- Across the nine-acre site, the mound height is nine feet. We will be comparing the bathymetry before and after the project.

Bryant Chesney (NMFS)- I am hearing that there will be benefits to downcoast beaches; however, from the modeling data, it appears the sediment would not reach the beach. Is that correct?

Weixia Jin (Moffatt and Nichol)- That is correct, but under certain wave conditions, the material would be pushed to the shore. This is one reason we want to limit the area of placement to the surf zone.

Bryant Chesney (NMFS)- So there is some indirect benefit to the beach, but most sediment would go into the littoral cell?

Weixia Jin (Moffatt and Nichol)- Correct.

Bryant Chesney (NMFS)- There are existing sediment resources in the Santa Monica Bay littoral cell, correct?

Chris Webb (Moffatt and Nichol)- Yes, but the resources are near LAX and Manhattan Beach and would need to be dredged to become available due to their depth.

Bryant Chesney (NMFS)- On Figure 4.38, I am still seeing an erosive environment in the shallow subtidal or intertidal areas.

Rosi Dagit (RCDSMM)- None of the blue area is erosive, it just indicates one foot of deposition. There are no negative numbers on the figure.

Bryant Chesney (NMFS)- Not the figure we are currently viewing on the screen, but Figure 4.38 in the report on page 58. If there is a negative number there, what does that mean?

Weixia Jin (Moffatt and Nichol)- That graph shows material being pushed deeper. It does not compare conditions with or without the project, just with the project occurring. We can provide more clarification on that.

Jamie King (RCDSMM)- More environmentally sensitive areas are present shallower than 15 feet. Areas deeper than 15 feet are largely characterized by sand and gravel substrates.

Rosi Dagit (RCDSMM)- In addition, please note that all material to be excavated is beyond the wetland boundaries of the lagoon.

Bryant Chesney (NMFS)- Can the Corps confirm whether they believe surfgrass is a special aquatic site under the “vegetated shallows” category?

Stephen Estes (Corps)- Yes, we would consider surfgrass to be a special aquatic site under that category.

Jeremy Smith (CCC)- For clarity, marine resources are never considered ESHA but are protected under a different policy in the Coastal Act.

Larry Smith (Corps)- Cleaning also applies to equipment such as bulldozers on land as well as any vessels.

Allan Ota (USEPA)- It sounds like this material would not do much to nourish the beach, is that correct?

Chris Webb (Moffatt and Nichol)- No, the sediment would travel east to beach sites downcoast.

Allan Ota (USEPA)- Please add a compass to the map figures.

Jeremy Smith (CCC)- Thank you for looking at additional placement areas. Do you have a preferred site at this point? Also, the modelling showed it is not a very large amount of material. It can be challenging to look at the models which had to make assumptions. For example, I see the results showing erosion of the shallower nearshores as potentially a relic of having to use only four grain size classes which may not have captured the sort of equilibrium gradation that exists in reality. I see the material moving from the mound as beneficial to downcoast beaches even if it doesn't make it onto dry beach due to its ability to serve as a buttress in the beach profile.

Weixia Jin (Moffatt and Nichol)- We would use a hydraulic pump, which would allow the material to mobilize easier. We were thinking the western location would be better for surfing considerations.

Larry Smith (Corps)- Based on the model results of dispersion by grain size, it appears that the placement site would become coarser with most of the pebble and coarse sand remaining in place while the finer materials would be dispersed.

Jeremy Smith (CCC)- That is my understanding as well. These coarser materials would remain as sands are transported onshore and downcoast and form an “armor layer” of pebbles and gravel.

Bryant Chesney (NMFS)- The struggle is the various resources we are trying to balance. At what point does it not become beneficial reuse?

Allan Ota (USEPA)- Finer-grained material would be better placed in a shallower area. To follow up on Bryant’s concerns, it would seem direct placement on the beach would be the best option, except for the differences in sediment color. Placement as close to the beach as possible would be best for nourishment purposes.

Jeremy Smith (CCC)- I agree from a coastal engineering standpoint, but the environmental resources are greater there and it would include burial of rocky substrate.

Rosi Dagit (RCDSMM)- There was another project for which they placed sediment as close to shore as possible. L.A. County Beaches and Harbors were required to remove and relocate the sediment.

Chris Dellith (USFWS)- The USFWS will defer to Bryant Chesney (NMFS) and Leslie Hart (CDFW).

Leslie Hart (CDFW)- I agree with Bryant Chesney’s comments.

Lia Protopapadakis F. (Corps)- Bryant, please state your overarching concerns again.

Bryant Chesney (NMFS)- It is unclear to me the actual benefits to the shoreline in addition to the burial of rocky substrate and surf grass with no compensatory mitigation or monitoring efforts to avoid and minimize effects to those resources.

Lia Protopapadakis F. (Corps)- We can separate the decisions here for placement suitability versus mitigation and monitoring efforts.

Bryant Chesney (NMFS)- I see that as a potential, but past suitability determinations have provided more weight and impetus to move forward without additional discussions on mitigation and monitoring efforts. Specifically, the Corps has previously justified their disagreement with Essential Fish Habitat conservation recommendations regarding sediment placement locations based upon the SC-DMMT’s review and approval, and without providing a scientific justification for any disagreement regarding anticipated effects.

Allan Ota (USEPA)- I would be curious to see the grain sizes at the proposed discharge location relative to the grain sizes at the beach.

Rosi Dagit (RCDSMM)- Bryant, is your concern that mitigation and monitoring efforts would not be implemented?

Bryant Chesney (NMFS)- That is correct.

Rosi Dagit (RCDSMM)- We would be more than willing to propose and implement those measures.

Lia Protopapadakis F. (Corps)- Are we ready to approve the SAPR and make a suitability determination here with the caveat that we will need to consider mitigation and monitoring efforts with the applicant and resource agencies?

Jeremy Smith (CCC)- I agree with Lia, that is where we are at right now. The CCC believes a deeper placement location is better for environmental resources and shallower is better for beach nourishment and the challenge will be balancing those while meeting goals/requirements of all agencies.

Allan Ota (USEPA)- I agree with the information Melissa Scianni sent via email. Has there been consideration of additional monitoring efforts?

Rosi Dagit (RCDSMM)- Yes, in the EIR, we have many monitoring requirements, including while the material is being discharged.

Allan Ota (USEPA)- When you begin scaling up a project, you might see some impacts that you were not expecting to see.

Rosi Dagit (RCDSMM)- We agree, but 256,000 cubic yards would be the absolute maximum of material. It could be less than that.

Lia Protopapadakis F. (Corps)- We have preliminary approval of the SAPR and suitability determinations from the permitting agencies at this meeting. We will follow up via email on final approvals/determinations and to schedule two meetings, one for agencies-only and one with the applicant, to discuss avoidance/placement location, and minimization/monitoring measures. The applicant will also provide, and the Corps will circulate, a copy of the presentation from today.