

Other proposed project modifications may require Congressional authorization.

2. The group of islands known as Poplar Island are located in Talbot County, Maryland, in the upper-middle portion of the Chesapeake Bay, 34 nautical miles south-southeast of Baltimore Harbor, and one mile northwest of Tilghman Island. Poplar Island has been identified by the U.S. fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service, and other resource agencies as a valuable nesting and nursery area for many species of wildlife, including bald eagles, osprey, heron, egrets, and least terns.

The PIERP was developed through cooperative efforts of the Corps, MPA, and many other Federal, State and local agencies, public and private organizations, and the general public. The PIERP reconstructed the island to its approximately 1847 footprint. The Maryland Environmental Service (MES) completed environmental and technical reconnaissance-level studies at Poplar Island. The PIERP was studied by the Corps under the authority of section 204 of WRDA 1992. Section 204 provides authority for the Corps to implement projects for the protection, restoration, and creation of aquatic and ecologically related habitats, including wetlands, in connection with the construction, operation, or maintenance of an authorized Federal navigation project. A feasibility report and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) were completed in February 1996. The feasibility report was approved by the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works on September 4, 1996. The environmental restoration project, through the beneficial use of dredged material, was approved for construction under section 537 of WRDA96. See section 3, paragraph D, below for sources of this dredged material.

The PIERP containment dikes were constructed in three stages. Phase I included construction of the northern 640 acres contained by sand dikes, construction of rock reefs at the northern end of the project, construction of a rock breakwater between Poplar Island and Coaches Island and construction of geotextile tube breakwaters along the southwest side of Coaches Island as protection until Phase II. Phase I was completed in March 2000. Phase II included dike construction to contain the southern 500 acres and was completed in February 2002. Phase III construction raised the dikes in Cell No. 2, the northern upland cell, from an initial elevation of 10 feet

mean lower low water (MLLW), to an elevation of 20 feet MLLW. Raising of the dikes in Cell Nos. 2 and 6 to the authorized elevation of 23 feet will be accomplished in future phases. To date, approximately 8 million cubic yards (mcy) of dredged material has been placed at Poplar Island in the Phase I area.

The current project design includes development of half of the land area as wetlands (570 acres) with the remaining portion as upland habitat (570 acres). Of the wetlands, 80 percent are being developed as low marsh and 20 percent as high marsh (456 acres low marsh, 114 acres high marsh). Small upland islands, ponds, and dendritic guts or channels will be created to increase habitat diversity within the marsh areas. It is expected that habitat diversity will be increased in the upland areas by the construction of small ponds and providing for areas of native forest, open shrub and native grasses.

The original project at Poplar Island was envisioned for construction during a 24-year period through the placement of up to 2 mcy of dredged material per year. The actual dredged material placement at Poplar Island has increased beyond planned levels due to the continued need to improve and to maintain the Chesapeake Bay approach channels to the Port of Baltimore and the restrictions of other placement options.

The proposed PIERP expansion would increase the dredged material capacity of the island and add further environmental and possibly recreational features at the facility.

3. The GRR is a decision document that will comply with NEPA through supplemental documentation to the existing Poplar Island EIS. An integrated Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) addressing raising the dikes above the authorized height of 23 feet and the proposed footprint expansion alternatives will be prepared. If during the study period it is determined that an EIS is not needed to comply with NEPA, an Environmental Assessment (EA) would be prepared instead. The Corps, Baltimore District proposes that the Poplar Island Expansion general reevaluation study further investigate and fully evaluate solutions to expand the placement capacity at Poplar Island by dike raising in the upland cells of the island and/or expanding the footprint with additional enhancements. The report will therefore consider the following:

a. *Dike Raising*—The study will evaluate raising the upland cell dikes (Cell Nos. 2 and 6) above the authorized height of 23 feet MLLW) at Poplar Island

to an unspecified elevation to be determined during the study. This modification is not expected to change the beneficial use of the project. This alternative may increase placement capacity by 10 to 20 million cubic yards or more depending on the final elevation.

b. *Expansion of the Existing Footprint*—Expanding the footprint of the island to increase the placement capacity of the island as well as adding additional environmental benefits to the project will be studied. Proposed alignments will consider potential expansion along the northeastern side of the island and southern side of the island. All alignments would increase dredged material capacity and add environmental habitat. The northeastern alignment would also provide increased protection to Poplar Harbor and Jefferson Island.

The Talbot County government requested that Poplar Island expansion investigations include recreation and education opportunities at the island. Features of this type may include, but are not limited to recreational beach creation, hiking trails, educational facilities, bird watching, camping, and other passive recreation. The study will determine whether such features could be incorporated into the design of the island without compromising the restoration goals and intent of the project. Issues to be addressed include transportation to and from the island (and the impacts thereof) and providing facilities that allow for minimal human impact to environmentally sensitive areas. These issues will be coordinated extensively with interested agencies.

c. *Environmental Enhancements—Poplar Harbor*—To the east of the Poplar Island project is Poplar Island. This area is protected from the wave energy of the open Chesapeake Bay by the project to the west, Coaches Island to the south, and Jefferson Island to the north. One of the goals of the project is to facilitate the return of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) within the harbor by protecting the harbor and providing quiescent shallow water habitat. Efforts should be made to maximize this restoration potential through further protection of the northern side of the harbor. Expansion of the footprint could be designed to accomplish this goal, but if that is not considered feasible, other structural means (breakwaters, jetty, etc.) should be considered.

*Jefferson Island*—Jefferson Island was one of the remaining remnants of Poplar Island that existed prior to the restoration project. The project does not incorporate Jefferson Island into the