

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON OPERATION OF HOPPER DREDGES  
IN THE SABINE-NECHES WATERWAY PROJECT

On January 23, 1996, the Government-owned hopper dredge *Wheeler* began work on the Sabine Pass Outer Bar, and Sabine Bank Channels of the Sabine-Neches Waterway Project. Dredging specifications required dredging an estimated 6,302,000 cubic yards (CY) of shoal material. The required depth of dredging was 44 feet below Mean Low Tide (MLT, Corps of Engineers Datum), with 2 feet of allowable overdepth dredging.

Dredging began on January 23, 1996, and was completed on April 26, 1996. A total of 817 loads were collected during dredging between Stations 0+000 and 40+000 along the Outer Bar Channel, and 70+000 to 95+734 in the Sabine Bank Channel. A total of 3,723,835 CY of material were excavated from within the channel.

The dredge was equipped with rigid draghead turtle deflectors, and 100% inflow screening with a 4-inch square mesh. NMFS-approved turtle observers provided 24-hour/day monitoring of dragheads and screens for each load cycle. The observers were employed by Coastwise Consulting.

No turtles were encountered during the performance of this dredging. A copy of the daily and weekly observer reports is enclosed.

One of the difficulties experienced by the observers involved the excessive amounts of clay that were often dredged. The clay was taken as cohesive masses which often clogged the screening and made cleanup physically difficult and time-consuming. The dredge also often picked up abundant amounts of trash, which fouled the screens and required manual removal.