

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON HOPPER DREDGE OPERATIONS  
IN THE MATAGORDA SHIP CHANNEL PROJECT

On October 3, 1996, the contract hopper dredge *Ouachita* began work in the Entrance Channel of the Matagorda Ship Channel Project. Contract specifications required dredging an estimated 392,000 cubic yards (CY) of shoal material. The required depth of dredging was 41 feet below Mean Low Tide (MLT, Corps of Engineers Datum), with 2 feet of allowable overdepth dredging, except for the channel segment from Stations -9+000 to -9+500 where the required depth was -43 feet MLT with 2 feet of overdepth.

Dredging began on October 3, 1996, and was completed on October 21, 1996. A total of 270 loads of dredged material was collected and deposited into Placement Area No. 1. Dredging was performed between Stations -9+000 and -20+000. A total of 488,383 CY of material was 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 under a subcontract to the dredging contractor, Gulf Coast Trailing Co., Inc.

During the performance of this dredging, only one sea turtle take was experienced. This take of a loggerhead occurred on October 13, in load No. 154. A copy of the daily and weekly observer reports is enclosed.

Material that was dredged consisted of silt, clay and sand. Although the screens occasionally became clogged with clay and debris, this occurred less frequently than at Freeport, Galveston, or Sabine-Neches Waterway.