

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON HOPPER DREDGE OPERATIONS
IN THE BRAZOS ISLAND HARBOR PROJECT

JUNE 2008

On June 3, 2008, the contract hopper dredge *R.N. Weeks* began dredging in the Jetty Channel of the Brazos Island Harbor (BIH) Project. Contract specifications required dredging an estimated 450,000 cubic yards (CY) of shoal material. The required depth of dredging was 46 feet below Mean Low Tide (MLT, Corps of Engineers Datum), with 2 feet of allowable overdepth dredging.

Dredging began on June 3, 2008, and was completed on June 23, 2008. Dredging operations were continuous during this time period, excavating about 490,690 CY of material between Stations -0+600 and -5+600. A total of 199 loads of dredged material were collected and deposited into the nearshore berm at Placement Area Nos. 1A and 1B.

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, Inc. under subcontract to the dredging contractor, Weeks Marine, Inc.

During the performance of this dredging, two turtle takes were experienced, one lethal loggerhead take and one live green. The first take was a loggerhead on June 20 in load 172, the second was the green on June 21 in load 178. This green was alive and appeared to be well except for minor injuries. It was transported to Sea Turtle, Inc., a rehabilitation facility for care and observation. As of July 8, this turtle, named Todd, continues to be treated to prevent infection. The surface water temperature during these takes was about 28.0°C.

Relocation trawling was conducted using two trawlers working on a 24-hour daily basis prior to, and during dredging operations. Trawling operations were initiated on May 30. Operation of these vessels was coordinated to provide better channel coverage, and provide opportunity to release captured turtles while maintaining continuous trawling by at least one boat. A total of 14 turtles were tagged and relocated; 11 were loggerheads, including three recaptures. There were also two Kemp's ridleys and one green.

Trawling and tagging data, observer and incident reports, can all be accessed at the USACE Sea Turtle Data Warehouse. The link is:

<http://el.erdc.usace.army.mil/seaturtles/project.cfm?Id=598&Code=Project>.

Coordination was conducted with the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network (STSSN). There were no reports of stranded turtles that bore injuries that might be consistent with a potential encounter with a hopper dredge.

Material dredged consisted mostly of sand and silt. There were no indications that the material or debris caused any problems such as screen clogs.