



# Maintaining operational flexibility for dredging by scientifically-defensible take limits on threatened and endangered species

## Dredging Operations Environmental Research (DOER) Program

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

BUILDING STRONG®

### Focus Area

Environmental Resource Management

### Problem

Dredging operations are constrained by restrictions designed to reduce incidental mortality (i.e., take) on threatened and endangered species. In coastal waters, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) sets incidental take limits in Biological Opinions for USACE dredging projects as well as take for other agencies and industries. There is not a clear understanding of how/why take limits vary among organizations.



Image: <https://www.industrialclutch.com/industry/dredging.html>

### Study Description

This study will focus on developing a quantitative comparison of dredging and non-dredging sources of incidental take. The study will place USACE incidental take in context with other incidental take limits. The study will first conduct a literature review of all existing biological opinions and other documents that describe incidental take for species encountered by USACE projects. This information will be synthesized into a technical document. Addressing this need will not only provide a foundation for a scientifically-defensible approach for quantifying the impact of dredging on T&E species, but also serve as a springboard towards a productive collaboration with NMFS.



### Products

The products from this work unit will be a series of white papers that (1) quantify the take associated with USACE projects, and (2) for developing strategies for how to engage other agencies when determining incidental take for USACE operations.



### Summary

Optimizing operational efficiency for dredging is a primary concern affecting the USACE Civil Works mission. Currently, dredging operations are constrained by restrictions designed to reduce incidental mortality on threatened and endangered species. In coastal waters, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) sets incidental take limits in Biological Opinions for USACE dredging projects. These take limits are often based on the precautionary principle and do not often consider current data. This study will quantify incidental take limits imposed upon USACE and present them in the context of take limits for other agencies and industries.



*Balancing operational and environmental initiatives and meeting complex challenges of dredging and dredged material placement in support of the navigation mission.*



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