



# Transforming the Current Pre-Authorization Study Process

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

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## SUMMARY

The Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) (ASA(CW)) and the US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) senior leadership have been working collaboratively to modernize the Civil Works Planning Program to better address the many water resources challenges that face the nation. It is imperative that we revitalize our Planning Program in order to respond to the current and future water resources needs of the nation. . We have developed a proposed civil works planning study process which shortens the timeframe for completion of a pre-authorization study while retaining the quality of the analyses and is consistent with the general concepts emerging from the revised Principals and Guidelines. The proposed process should dramatically shorten the amount of time and cost of conducting planning studies and increase corporate and individual accountability for decisions. In 2011 and 2012 the Corps is conducting a National Pilot Program to test the proposed concepts within our policy and develop and refine methodologies and processes for planning studies across all business lines in a manner that is sustainable and replicable and that will inform future Civil Works guidance. The outcome of the National Pilot Program will determine if the concepts will continue beyond the pilot studies or if additional modifications will be needed.

## What is the Vision for Future Planning?

The Corps has developed a proposed study process with clearly defined decision points that is more predictable, more efficient, and takes significantly less time than the current pre-authorization study process. The pre-authorization study process can be completed more efficiently and will provide:

- Clear information and a way forward for project sponsors and communities who are seeking to solve a specific problem;
- Appropriate levels of analysis that use the federal dollar wisely;
- Identification of the level of federal interest (and investment) and the responsibility of all parties in identifying and executing the solution to the problem;
- Distinct decision points during the process and accountability for those decisions; and
- Meaningful engagement of the Corps, the ASA(CW), the project sponsor, and other federal and state agencies before a project is recommended for authorization to Congress.

The transformed pre-authorization study process relies on the current Corps planning process and includes appropriate levels of review. The new study process builds on the strengths of the Corps and continues to use quality engineering, economics, and environmental analyses. However, it deliberately and thoughtfully scales the amount and type of data collected and analysis conducted to reflect the likelihood and magnitude of the consequences of the decisions being made.

## What is the New Planning Paradigm?

The New Planning Paradigm consists of five concepts:

- Ensure that vertical integration and engagement of decision makers takes place early and throughout the planning process.
- Identify the federal interest in resolving a problem early in the study, including the Level of Federal interest and level of Federal investment looking beyond National Economic Development (NED) and National Ecosystem Restoration (NER).
- Manage and balance an adequate level of detail and uncertainty throughout the pre-authorization planning process, eliminating unnecessary data collection and analyses while maintaining quality of analysis and outcome.
- Alternative Comparison and Selection recognizes that there is no single “best” plan, and there are a variety of approaches (quantitative and Qualitative) to multi-criteria decision making.
- Proper Resourcing: Ensure that all resources needed for the study – funding, human resources, data and information – are identified and available for the duration of the study.

## What is the National Pilot Program?

- In 2011, the Corps will methodically roll out a small number of pilots to test this approach. Examination of the process both during and after each pilot study will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the approach, develop guidelines for future studies (e.g., identify levels of analyses appropriate to each business line such as navigation, flood risk reduction, and ecosystem restoration), and suggest modifications to Corps processes, procedures, and policies, as appropriate.
- The purpose of the National Planning Pilot Program is to validate concepts of a new planning paradigm that shortens the timeframe for completion of a planning study and incorporates the general concepts emerging from the revised Principles and Guidelines.
  - Develop and refine methodologies and processes for planning across all business lines
  - Sustainable and replicable
  - Inform future planning guidance
  - Pilot Selection: To date, four pilot studies have been selected: Jordan Creek (Springfield), MO; Sutter Basin, CA; Palm Beach Harbor (Lake Worth Inlet), FL; and Westside Creeks, TX. Jordan Creek and Sutter Basin are flood risk management projects. Palm Beach Harbor is a navigation project, and Westside Creeks is an urban ecosystem restoration project.

The four concepts the pilots will test are: Uncertainty and Level of Detail: Balancing the level of uncertainty and risk with the level of detail of the study. Vertical Team Integration: Ensure early vertical team integration and engagement of decision makers, which will continue throughout the study process. Determine Federal Interest: Identify the Federal Interest early in the study, including the Level of Federal interest and level of Federal investment looking beyond National Economic Development (NED) and National Ecosystem Restoration (NER). Alternative Comparison and Selection: This concept recognizes that there is no single “best” plan, and there are a variety of approaches (quantitative and qualitative) to multi-criteria decision making.

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