Draft Integrated Interim Response Feasibility Report and Environmental Assessment for Actionable Elements

NEW YORK-NEW JERSEY HARBOR AND TRIBUTARIES COASTAL STORM RISK MANAGEMENT FEASIBILITY STUDY

APPENDIX F PUBLIC COORDINATION

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1 STUDY BACKGROUND

In 2012 Hurricane Sandy caused considerable loss of life, extensive damage to development, and massive disruption to the North Atlantic Coast. The effects of this storm were particularly severe because of its tremendous size and the timing of its landfall during high tide. Twenty-six states were impacted by Hurricane Sandy, and disaster declarations were issued in 13 states. New York and New Jersey were the most severely impacted states, with the greatest damage and most fatalities in the New York Metropolitan Area. For example, a storm surge of 12.65 feet and 9.4 feet above normal high tide was reported at Kings Point on the western end of Long Island Sound and the Battery at the southern tip of Manhattan, respectively. Flood depths due to the storm tide were as much as nine feet in Manhattan, Staten Island, and other low-lying areas within the New York Metropolitan Area. The storm exposed vulnerabilities associated with inadequate coastal storm risk management measures and lack of defense to critical transportation and energy infrastructure. Devastation in the wake of Hurricane Sandy revealed a need to address the vulnerability of populations, infrastructure, and resources at risk throughout the entire North Atlantic coastal region. At this time, Hurricane Sandy was the second most costly hurricane in the nation's history and the largest storm of its kind to hit the U.S. east coast.

Under the direction of Public Law 113-2, the Corps completed the North Atlantic Coast Comprehensive Study (NACCS) in January 2015, which identified nine high-risk focus areas of the North Atlantic Coast that warranted additional analyses by Corps to address coastal flood risk. One of the focus areas identified was the New York-New Jersey Harbor and Tributaries study area. The study area covers more than 2,150 square miles and comprises parts of Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Passaic, Somerset, and Union counties in New Jersey; and Rensselaer, Albany, Bronx, Columbia, Dutchess, Greene, Kings, Nassau, New York, Orange, Putnam, Queens, Richmond, Rockland, Ulster, and Westchester counties in New York. The study area includes all tidally affected waters and extends upstream of the Hudson River to the federal Troy Lock and Dam in Troy, New York, the Passaic River upstream to the Dundee Dam, and the Hackensack River to the Oradell Reservoir.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), New York District (District), initiated a feasibility study to identify coastal storm risk solutions in 2016 and subsequently released a Draft Integrated Feasibility Report (FR) and Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in September of 2022. The FR/EIS documented the tentatively selected plan (TSP) for the entire NYNJHATS focus area, alternatives formulated for consideration, environmental effects and conceptual mitigation measures necessary to avoid, minimize and mitigate impacts from the TSP.

Feedback from the public, resource agencies, and USACE senior leaders following the September 2022 release of the Draft Integrated Feasibility Report and Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement clearly indicated the need for a new strategic direction for study completion. Much of this feedback highlighted the region's critical need for near-term localized actions to manage coastal storm flood risk, and concerns about the ability of the USACE Civil Works process to maximize responsiveness to Federal budgetary and legislative cycles, working as a complement – not replacement for – a comprehensive plan. Similar concerns were raised related to how current Federal law and USACE policy could support timely construction of a coastal storm risk management project. This Interim Response to the study authority recommending near-term localized actions represents a first step in the study completion framework designed to bring coastal storm risk management solutions to communities in the NYNJHATS General Study Area.

2 COMPREHENSIVE STUDY

2.1 AGENCY COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

Coordination with stakeholders has been a critical component of the New York-New Jersey Harbor and Tributaries Study (NYNJHATS). There are five Cooperating Agencies for this study and one Participating Agency. Since early 2017 the USACE has held many workshops and meetings with Cooperating Agencies, and other stakeholders to share information on the study scope, purpose, and formulation of alternatives, as well as to exchange ideas and information on natural and marine resources within the NYNJHATS General Study Area. Specific relevant workshop and meeting dates are listed below in Tables 1 through 5.

The NEPA scoping period for the NYNJHATS originally spanned 45 days from July 6th - August 20, 2018, but, due to numerous requests from the public, was extended by 77 days for total of 122 days scoping period. The extended period was open until November 5, 2018. During the NEPA scoping public comment period, comments were submitted to a project email address, mailed by hard copy, or provided in person at one or more of the Scoping Meetings that were held during the scoping period. Scoping information received after this date continued to be compiled and considered as the study progressed, and are included in this Draft Interim Response Report and as part of the administrative record.

Originally, there were five NEPA scoping meetings scheduled for this study. Pursuant to the request of congressional representatives, USACE held four additional meetings. Meeting locations were chosen to be easily accessible by transit, able to accommodate large groups, and dispersed throughout the large study area, such that interested stakeholders could reasonably travel to at least one meeting. The dates, locations, and numbers of participants for each meeting are listed in ***Table 1***. There was a total of nine meetings in six locations that reached 705 participants, though some participants stayed for both meetings where there were two sessions in one day and some participants came to subsequent meetings throughout the region. Information was provided to the public through a combination of PowerPoint presentations, poster sessions, and a structured question and answer session at the meetings. A poster session, hosted by the study team, was held at the conclusion of the formal presentation.

USACE announced the preparation of an Integrated FR/Tier 1 EIS for the NYNJHAT Feasibility Study in the February 13, 2018 Federal Register pursuant to the requirements of Section 102(2)(C) of NEPA. Tiering, which is defined in 40 CFR 1508.28, is a means of making the environmental review process more efficient by allowing parties to “eliminate repetitive discussions of the same issues and to focus on the actual issues suitable for decision at each level of environmental review”. The NEPA scoping period initially spanned 45 days from July 6 – August 20, 2018, but was extended to 120 days due to numerous requests from the public. USACE held a total of nine public scoping meetings during the public scoping period. Subsequent to the publication of the February 13, 2018 NOI, the Study was granted an exemption from the requirement to complete the feasibility study within 3 years, as required in Section 1001(a) of the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014. This exemption was granted on October 31, 2018, and allowed for an additional 15 months to complete the Draft Integrated Feasibility Report and Tier 1 EIS. Therefore, in order to align the revised study schedule with the Council on Environmental Quality’s National Environmental Policy Act Implementing Regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), a Notice to Withdraw the original NOI was published in the February 13, 2019 Federal Register.

To further provide the public with Study information prior to the Draft Report, an Interim Report was released on February 19, 2019 that identified the preliminary economic, environmental, engineering and other studies performed to date of the above referenced alternatives (USACE, 2019). Seventeen public meetings at ten different locations, related to the Interim Report were also held (***Table 3***). USACE published a second NOI in the January 13, 2020 Federal Register.

In 2019, four New York Bight Ecological Model (NYBEM) workshops were held on January 3rd, March 11th, June 6th, and November 14th. These meetings informed development of the NYBEM model, which was set up to be used as a tool for assessing direct and indirect effects of agency actions on regional ecosystems, including NYNJHATS.

In February 2020, NYNJHATS paused until October 2021 due to a lack of Federal funding. A second Notice to Withdraw was published in the Federal Register on June 1, 2020.

Following Study resumption, the New York District held several Cooperating Agency meetings in order to facilitate open communication, share Study progress, status updates, and data as it became available, including an Engineering presentation on the Study Alternatives, a presentation on the NYBEM development since the workshops were held in 2019, and a presentation on the TSP. These meetings took place on February 17th, June 9th, August 3rd, August 11th. Additionally, the New York District provided e-mail Study status updates on January 31st, May 6th, July 14th, August 8th, and August 26th between Agency coordination meetings. As part of the continuing coordination for the Study, the New York District offered shapefiles of the NYNJHATS Alternative alignments to all Cooperating and Participating Agencies in preparation for future consultation and coordination. Cooperating/Participating Agencies were asked to provide data, input, and comments or recommendations on the Alternatives and analysis, in advance of the comments that would be provided as part of an official review of the Draft Integrated FR/Tier 1 EIS. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service provided written comments during the scoping period, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration/National Marine Fisheries Service provided written comments on the Interim Report and Study schedule. Copies of these letters are provided in Attachment 3.

In March of 2022 the New York District initiated consultation with the New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office (NJSHPO), the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (NYSOPRHP), Federal and State Recognized Tribes, Historical Groups, and Stakeholders in the Study Area under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and NEPA and notified the SHPOs, Tribes and the Advisory Councill on Historic Preservation (ACHP) of its intent to develop a Programmatic Agreement for the Project to address the potential for adverse effects from the Project. A webinar was held on May 23, 2022 with several stakeholders and interested parties, including the National Park Service, to introduce the study and solicit comments. Copies of the letters are provided in Attachment 3.

The 3rd Notice of Intent was published in the Federal Register on 22 August 2022.

Table 1: List of Scoping Meetings

Date	Location	Number of Participants
July 9, 2018, 3 PM	Lower Manhattan, New York County	139
July 9, 2018, 6 PM	Lower Manhattan, New York County	115
July 10, 2018, 3 PM	Newark, Essex County	19
July 10, 2018, 6 PM	Newark, Essex County	8
July 11, 2018	Poughkeepsie, Dutchess County	158
September 20, 2018	Coney Island, King County	78
October 3, 2018, 3 PM	White Plains, Westchester County	74
October 3, 2018, 6 PM	White Plains, Westchester County	51
October 23, 2018	Nassau County	63

Nine Meetings Total	Six Locations	705 Meeting Participants

Table 2: Stakeholder/Agency Workshops

Date	Meeting Description	Location
January 18, 2017	Stakeholder/Agency Workshop	New Jersey Transit Planning Authority Office
January 24, 2017	Stakeholder/Agency Workshop	290 Broadway, NY
February 7, 2017	Stakeholder/Agency Workshop	SUNY, New Paltz, NY
January 3, 2019	NYBEM Modeling Workshop	Philadelphia District
March 11, 2019	NYBEM Modeling Workshop	New York District
June 6, 2019	NYBEM Modeling Workshop	290 Broadway, NY
July 14, 2019	NYBEM Modeling Workshop	New York District

Table 3: Interim Report Public Meetings (2019)

Date	Meeting Description	Location
March 12, 2019, 2PM	Public information session	Westchester County Center, White Plains, NY
March 12, 2019, 6PM	Public information session	Westchester County Center, White Plains, NY
March 13, 2019	Public information session	South Shore Educational Complex, Canarsie, NY
March 19, 2019, 2PM	Public information session	Snug Harbor Cultural Center, Snug Harbor, NY
March 19, 2019, 6PM	Public information session	Snug Harbor Cultural Center, Snug Harbor, NY
March 27, 2019, 2PM	Public information session	Middletown Arts Center, Middletown, NJ
March 27, 2019, 6PM	Public information session	Middletown Arts Center, Middletown, NJ
April 3, 2019, 2PM	Public information session	Hudson Valley Community Center, Poughkeepsie, NY
April 3, 2019, 6PM	Public information session	Hudson Valley Community Center, Poughkeepsie, NY
April 9, 2019, 2PM	Public information session	Alexander Hamilton U.S. Custom House, Bowling Green, NY
April 9, 2019, 6PM	Public information session	Alexander Hamilton U.S. Custom House, Bowling Green, NY

April 11, 2019, 2PM	Public information session	Meadowlands Environment Center, Lyndhurst, NJ
April 11, 2019, 6PM	Public information session	Meadowlands Environment Center, Lyndhurst, NJ
April 17, 2019, 2PM	Public information session	Hostos Community College, Bronx, NY
April 17, 2019, 6PM	Public information session	Hostos Community College, Bronx, NY
October 24, 2019	Public Meeting on NYNJHATS Interim Response and Induced Flooding	Great Neck, NY
November 21, 2019	Public Meeting on NYNJHATS Interim Report	Coney Island, NY
17 Meetings Total	**Around 5,000 comments received**	**10 Locations**

Table 4: Cooperating/Participating Agency Meetings

Date	Meeting Description	Location
February 17, 2022	Cooperating/Participating Agency Meeting	Virtual
June 9, 2022	Cooperating/Participating Agency Meeting	Virtual
August 3, 2022	Cooperating/Participating Agency Meeting	Virtual
August 11, 2022	Cooperating/Participating Agency Meeting	Virtual
September 21, 2023	Cooperating/Participating Agency Meeting	Virtual
May 20, 2025	Cooperating/Participating Agency Meeting	Virtual

Table 5: Notice of Intent Publication Dates

Notice of Intent	Publication Date in Federal Register
First	February 13, 2018
Withdrawn	February 13, 2019
Second	January 13, 2020
Withdrawn	June 1, 2020
Third	August 22, 2022

Table 6: Relevant Dates/Milestones

Action	Date
Study Start	July 15, 2016
Scoping	July 6, 2018 – November 5, 2018
Release of Interim Report	February 19, 2019
Public meetings for Interim Report	March 2019 – January 2020
Delay due to lack of funding	February 2020 -September 2021
Release Draft Integrated Feasibility Report and Tier 1 (Programmatic) EIS	September 23, 2022
Public Meetings for Draft Report	October 2022 – March 2023
Release of Draft Interim Response FR/EA	July 24, 2025

2.2 SCOPING PROCESS

In order to help scope the study, the study team elicited public input during the NEPA Scoping Period. During this period, the District and its partners, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), with its partner, the New York City Mayor's Office of Recovery and Resiliency (NYCORR), and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) as the non-federal sponsors, initiated an investigation into the feasibility of coastal storm risk management (CSRM) in the study area with the intent of recommending a plan that will contribute to community and environmental resilience.

Scoping is the process used to identify issues, concerns, and opportunities for enhancement or mitigation associated with the proposed action. The purpose of the scoping process is to:

- Invite the participation of local, county, state, and federal resource agencies, Indian Tribes, non-government organizations (NGOs), and the public to identify significant environmental and socioeconomic issues related to the study

- Determine the depth of analysis and significance of issues to be addressed in the Integrated Feasibility Report/EIS

- Identify how the proposed alternatives would or would not contribute to cumulative effects in the study area

- Identification of any local, county, state, and federal resource plans and future project proposals in the study area, implementation schedules, as well as any data that would help to describe past and present actions, and effects of the project and other development activities, on environmental and socioeconomic resources

- Gather information, quantitative data, or professional opinions that may help define the scope of the analysis related to both site-specific and cumulative effects, and that may help identify significant environmental issues

- Solicit, from local, county, state and federal agencies, as well as the public, available information on the resources within the study area

- Identify any information sources that might be available to characterize the existing environmental conditions, and analyze and evaluate impacts.

2.3 CONSULTATION WITH NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES

Consultation with Native American Tribes on the NYNJHAT Study was initiated in March of 2022 through email correspondence as an invitation to government-to-government consultation. An interagency and stakeholder's webinar was held on May 23, 2022 by the USACE to present the details of the project and to discuss its potential for impacts to cultural resources. The Delaware Nation has indicated that they wish to be a consulting party. The Stockbridge Munsee commented during the webinar that due to the potential for Native American archaeological sites in the study area they request to be a signatory on the Programmatic Agreement.

2.4 STAKEHOLDER LIST

Coordination with stakeholders has been a critical component of the Study and the development of a regional vision for managing coastal storm risk. Table 3 and Table 4 document the meetings, workshops, and charrettes that have taken place since the commencement of the study in July 2016. Stakeholders, as presented below, include but are not limited to, citizens, elected municipal officials, federal agencies, state agencies, non-profit environmental organizations, local and regional planning commissions, and commercial and recreational interests.

Partner/Sponsor:
The non-federal sponsors are the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), in partnership with the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (NYCDEP). A Feasibility Cost Sharing Agreement (FCSA) was executed on 15 July 2016.

Cooperating Agencies:
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
- U.S. Coast Guard (USCG)
- National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)/National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)
- National Park Service (NPS)

Participating Agencies:
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Federal Agencies (in addition to Cooperating and Participating Agencies)
- FEMA Sandy Regional Infrastructure Resilience Coordination Group
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
- U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT)
- U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
- U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)

State Agencies
- NJ Office of Emergency Management
- NJ State Historic Preservation Office
- NJ Department of Environmental Protection
- NY Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services
- NY Governor's Office of Storm Recovery
- NY Office of Emergency Management
- NY Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation
- NY State Historic Preservation Office

- NYSDEC
- Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PANYNJ)

Local Agencies & Offices
- Bergen, Passaic, Morris, Essex, Hudson, Union, Somerset, Middlesex, and Monmouth Counties in New Jersey; and Rensselaer, Albany, Columbia, Greene, Dutchess, Ulster, Putnam, Orange, Westchester, Rockland, and Nassau Counties in New York
- City of New York
  - NYC Department of Environmental Protection
  - NYC Parks Department
  - NYC Department of City Planning
  - NYC Department of Transportation
  - NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development
  - NYC Economic Development Corporation
  - NYC Housing Authority

Elected Officials
- U.S. Congress
- State of New Jersey
- State of New York
- Counties, cities, towns, villages, and other municipalities
- New York City Council

Stakeholders
- Local citizens
- Nongovernmental organizations (environmental groups, recreation groups, non-profit organizations)
- Community groups
- Community Boards
- Flood risk planning interests
- Navigation interests
- Academic institutions, including but not limited to the City University of New York, Monmouth University, New Jersey Institute of Technology, Rutgers University, the State University of New York, Stevens Institute of Technology, Stockton University, and Columbia University

Review Teams
- Agency Technical Review (ATR) Team
- Coastal Storm Risk Management Planning Center of Expertise (PCX-CSRM)
- District Quality Control (DQC) Team
- HQUSACE
- USACE North Atlantic Division
- Independent External Peer Review (IEPR) Panel

3 DRAFT FEASIBILITY REPORT (SEPTEMBER 2022) COMMENTS AND RESPONSES

3.1 DRAFT FEASIBILITY REPORT PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

The NYNJHATS Team prepared a Strategic Communications Plan for the study and engaged in an active public outreach strategy, participating in over 80 meetings during the public comment period. This included hosting 23 public meetings (including in-person, virtual and hybrid meetings) throughout the Study Area, and attending over 60 meetings hosted by others (e.g., academic institutions, community boards, local interest groups, etc.). During the public comment review period, three extensions to the public comment period were approved, totaling approximately 175+ days from September 2022 to March 2023. Almost 3,000 (2,768[3]) comments have been received, serving as a testament to the Study's magnitude and heightened interest to local, state, and federal Stakeholders. Stakeholder sources of comments received included elected officials, local governments, non-government organizations, academic institutions, private entities, and individuals.

Table 7: List of Public Meetings for the HATS Draft Integrated FR and Tier 1 (Programmatic) EIS

Location	Date
Virtual	October 24, 2022
Virtual	October 27, 2022
Virtual	November 5, 2022
Alexander Hamilton U.S. Custom House, 1 Bowling Green, New York, NY 10004 (Auditorium)	December 15, 2022
Alexander Hamilton U.S. Custom House, 1 Bowling Green, New York, NY 10004 (Auditorium)	December 15, 2022
New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) Campus Center (Atrium), 150 Bleeker Street, Newark, NJ, 07102	January 11, 2023
New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) Campus Center (Atrium), 150 Bleeker Street, Newark, NJ, 07102	January 11, 2023
Brooklyn Community Board 18 Public Meeting Room, 1097 Bergen Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11234	January 17, 2023
Brooklyn Community Board 18 Public Meeting Room, 1097 Bergen Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11234	January 17, 2023
Virtual	February 1, 2023
Virtual	February 6, 2023
Liberty Science Center, 222 Jersey City Blvd, Jersey City, NJ 07305	February 8, 2023
Liberty Science Center, 222 Jersey City Blvd, Jersey City, NJ 07305	February 8, 2023
New York Hall of Science, 47-01 111M St, Queens, NY 11368	February 13, 2023
New York Hall of Science, 47-01 111M St, Queens, NY 11368	February 13, 2023
Staten Island Borough Hall, 10 Richmond Terrace, Staten Island, NY 10301	February 16, 2023
Staten Island Borough Hall, 10 Richmond Terrace, Staten Island, NY 10301	February 16, 2023
Rockaway YMCA, 207 Beach 73rd St, Queens, NY	February 21, 2023
Rockaway YMCA, 207 Beach 73rd St, Queens, NY	February 21, 2023
Cardinal Hayes High School, 650 Grand Concourse, Bronx, NY 10451	February 23, 2023

Location	Date
Cardinal Hayes High School, 650 Grand Concourse, Bronx, NY 10451	February 23, 2023
Virtual	March 21, 2023
Virtual	March 22, 2023

Following the Draft Feasibility Report publication, a total of 258 letters were received via mail, e-mail, and public meeting cards to date. Many of the letters received included more than one comment, totaling to 2,767 individual comments. The Project Delivery Team held 12 public meetings in a hybrid format, utilizing Webex to receive comments, both in person and virtually. The team, additionally, held four in-person meetings and seven virtual meetings. These comments have been reviewed by New York District and categorized into 11 themes, presented in the pie chart below (***Figure 1***). After review of the comments and discussion with the vertical team and stakeholders, the NFSs and New York City sent a tri-party letter endorsing the advancement of Alternative 3B in the study. The most common comment themes include concerns for flooding (927 comments and 33% of the total), environmental impacts (823 comments and 30% of the total), Overall Study Questions/Concerns (802 comments and 29% of the total), and at-risk communities (582 comments and 21% of the total) related concerns.

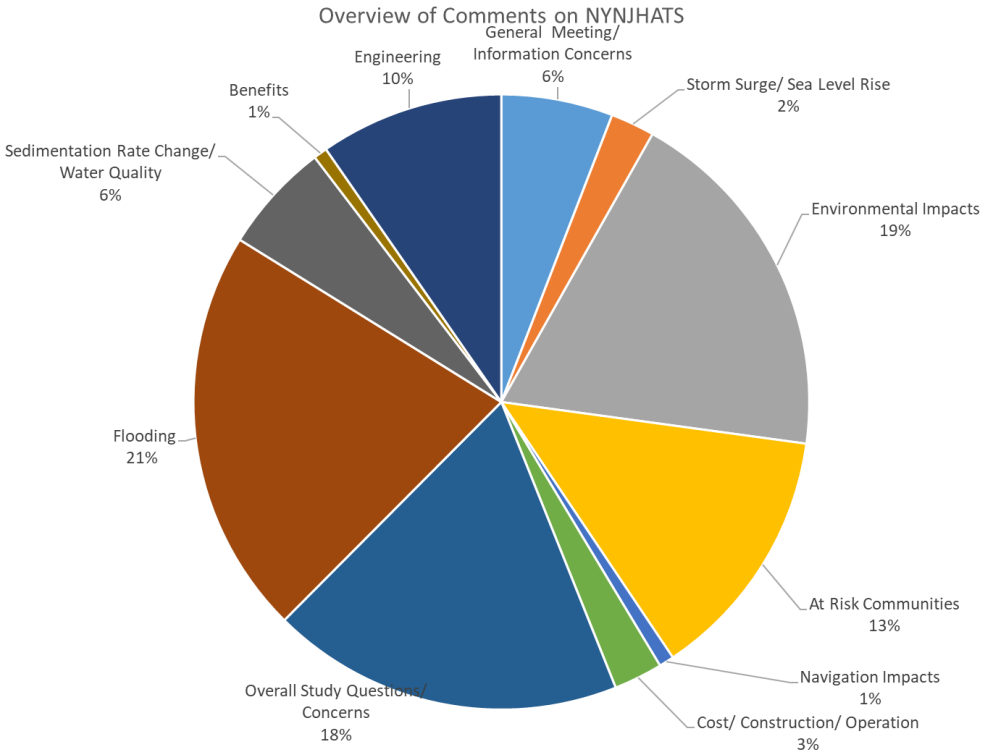

Figure 1: Summary of Comments on the Draft NYNJHATS Feasibility Report and Tier 1 (Programmatic) EIS

3.2 PUBLIC COMMENTS AND RESPONSES

Below is a list of repeated comments collected from members of the public, community groups, non-governmental organizations and resources agencies on the Draft Integrated FR and Tier 1 (Programmatic) EIS

that are relevant to this Interim Response and helped to inform the decision to focus on localized, near-term actions:

- *Need for further agency and public engagement on plan going forward:*

  Response: Due to the large scale and scope of the comprehensive study the District took a phased approach to the study whereby a system wide solution is identified for advancement and approval first, with more focused, iterative planning, data collection, analysis and design to further validate and advance the system wide (comprehensive) plan in tandem with additional public engagement. This study process was to be carried under a Tiered (Programmatic) NEPA approach so that input could be solicited from the public at multiple times throughout the study, when project details become available. The robust engagement that has taken place to date represents just part of the first stage of a phased design process, that will continue beyond the feasibility study to the design and construction phases, as the comprehensive plan is advanced. As the District shifts to a focus on identifying Actionable Elements it continues to be committed to robust Public Engagement throughout the process. More about the District plan for public outreach throughout the Actionable Elements Interim Response study is detailed below.

- *How does the District plan to incorporate nonstructural and natural or nature-based features into the plan?*

  Response: Given the highly urban nature of the NYC metropolitan area and the scale of the coastal flooding being addressed, the District recognized early on that structural measures would be the primary CSRM measure able to manage storm surge, however, nature-based solutions are considered to be important integral features for a complete solution and can be a very effective solution for managing more frequent flood risk while improving water quality and habitat. For the screening done in leading up to the Draft Report for the comprehensive plan, the NYNJHATS team was using the 1% flood condition with intermediate relative sea level change for common evaluation purposes. Because of this and since most natural and nature-based features are better suited for more frequent and less severe storm events, their application and inclusion in the various plans in the September 2022 Draft Report was limited. For this Interim Response, the team was able to look at areas that experience high frequency coastal flooding and meet the ecological parameters to support natural features. The Oakwood Beach Actionable Element, tentatively recommended in this Draft Integrated Interim Response FR and EA for Actionable Elements is an example of this, and the Harlem and East Riser Actionable Element sites present unique opportunities to potentially incorporate nature-based solutions as designs are advanced. Going forward in the study, the team will continue to look for opportunities for including nature-based solutions as both independent and complementary features.

- *How is the study considering environmental justice communities?*

  Response: As part of the Draft Integrated FR and Tier 1 (Programmatic) EIS, the District prepared an assessment of impacts and benefits to at risk communities in the “Other Social Effects and Environmental Justice Appendix” (see the September 2022 Draft Report, Appendix A12). While recent executive orders related to “environmental justice” have been rescinded (see Executive Order 14148 and 14173), NEPA requires a lead agency to consider impacts to the human environment, in addition to the natural one, including socioeconomics, demographics, and community characteristics, of which continue to be a consideration in plan development. Refer to report sections for “Socioeconomics and Demographics” in Appendix A of this Draft Integrated Interim Response FR and EA for Actionable Elements.

- *Concern with the speed of the study process, too fast or too slow:*

  Response: The study team recognizes the need to balance taking the time to develop a comprehensive coastal storm risk management project with addressing the immediate coastal storm risk on a quicker

schedule. The Draft report released in September 2022 acknowledged the need for further modeling, data gathering, and input from the public to confirm the tentatively selected plan and recent USACE policy guidance requires the agency to incorporate more site-specific data into any recommended plan. To balance this, a three-pronged study completion framework has been developed. This takes advantage of Federal legislative cycles to implement near-term localized actions that are informed by a comprehensive analysis.

1) Completion of an interim response to the study authority that will recommend the Congressional authorization of near-term constructible elements in a potential WRDA 2026.
2) Completion of a subsequent Interim Response to the study authority that will recommend the Congressional authorization of additional near-term constructible elements in a potential WRDA 2028, subject to the availability of funds. Other WRDAs, beyond 2028, may also be included in this effort, or as separate efforts.
3) Completion of a final response to the study authority that will recommend a comprehensive project to manage the region's coastal storm risk and increase coastal resiliency, subject to the availability of funds. The District and the study sponsors and partners have an interest in continuing the investigation of the comprehensive plan documented in the September 2022 draft integrated FR and Tier 1 (Programmatic) EIS should the funding be allocated by Congress.

- *Need for greater incorporation of natural and nature-based features (more "green") and nonstructural measures when possible.*

  Response: Given the highly urban nature of the NYC metropolitan area, structural measures are the primary CSRM measure able to manage storm surge however, nature-based solutions are considered to be important integral features for a complete solution and can be a very effective solution for managing the frequent flood risk while improving water quality and habitat. Nature-based solutions are a part of every NYNJHATS Comprehensive Plan Alternative and will be incorporated where appropriate as the project advances to further design. For this Interim Response, the team was able to look at areas that experience high frequency coastal flooding and meet the ecological parameters to support natural features. The Oakwood Beach Actionable Element tentatively recommended in this Draft Integrated Interim Response FR and EA for Actionable Elements is an example of a nature-based complementary feature. Additionally, the Harlem River and East Riser Actionable Element sites may have opportunities to incorporate complementary nature-based solutions as designs are advanced, particularly for the Harlem River Seaward Alignment. Going forward in the study, the team will continue to look for opportunities for including nature-based solutions as both independent and complementary features.

- *Is managed retreat a good solution for this project?*

  Response: Acquisitions of at-risk structures are one of the measures considered in combination with floodproofing or structural measures such as floodwalls, barriers, or nature-based solutions. As the General Study Area is very large and complex, it is unlikely that any single measure will be appropriate for use throughout the entire study area.

- *Request for evaluating more combined flood risks & interior drainage issues, as may be caused by rainfall fluvial/pluvial impacts coincident with coastal storms.*

  Response: Section 8106(a) of WRDA 2022 provides an avenue for non-Federal sponsors to request study teams formulate alternative plans that maximize the benefits from the reduction of comprehensive flood risk drivers. The non-Federal sponsors submitted a joint request to the Office of the ASA(CW) for such work to be completed. The Office provided a response on March 26, 2025, indicating that the New York District work together with the non-Federal sponsors to complete this analysis. The group agreed to complete this analysis of comprehensive flood risks in two parts, which reflects the challenges of

expanding the current analysis to include comprehensive flood risks for an entire study region at this phase in the study:

1) in a limited capacity and as applicable during the development of Actionable Elements (first and second prong of the study completion framework), as appropriate under DRSAA 2020 guiding rules
2) during refinement of the Tentatively Selected Plan described in the September 2022 Draft Integrated Feasibility Report and Tier 1 (Programmatic) Environmental Impact Statement (third prong of study completion framework).

The site of East Riser itself meets the condition of Section 8106(a) considerations through the confluence of coastal and riverine flood drivers.

- *Final plans and analysis should be based on the best available, regional climate science, rather than the current outdated projections used in the TSP, which are lower than regional, peer-reviewed projections by the New York City Panel on Climate Change and Rutgers University, and those developed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.*

  Response: USACE is required to evaluate the performance of alternatives against relative sea level change scenarios, as described in Engineer Regulation 1100-2-8162, "Incorporating Sea Level Change in Civil Works Programs," 15 June 2019. Beyond the prescribed relative sea level change scenarios, the study team is conducting a sensitivity test of the proposed action against state and local projections.

- *Need for more refined, more detailed environmental impact analyses, especially of water quality and ecological impacts from storm surge barriers.*

  Response: The September 2022 Draft Report was limited to the scope of a Tier 1 (programmatic) document, containing a broad-level review of the nine Planning Regions' existing conditions, and the potential for environmental consequences of the structural components of each action Alternative. Several data gaps have been identified that prevent a complete review of the Comprehensive Plan during the Tier 1 (Programmatic) phase under NEPA and, as a result, make phased/tiered compliance with some environmental laws necessary until site specific details are better known. Resource agencies and other members of the public expressed concerns that limited design details and lack of modeling (e.g., NYBEM, aquatic resource effects, storm surge and wave, AdH hydrodynamic conditions, salinity, sediment transport, ADCIRC/coastal storm modeling) for the DEIS makes a comprehensive technical review premature. The National Park Service indicated that they will not be able to determine whether the Tentatively Selected Plan (TSP) will be "mutually acceptable" as required under P.L. 92-52. The District acknowledged in the Draft Report released in September 2022 that additional data is needed to complete coordination activities with Resources Agencies and achieve full compliance for the project. The Tiered (programmatic) NEPA approach USACE employed was the means for engaging the public and resource agencies at each phase in the plan development and design process so that feedback is received at the appropriate time. Following recent guidance requiring more advanced designs to support a recommendation for construction the District developed a study framework that includes additional data gathering and design inputs for the comprehensive plan. Should the comprehensive study be funded to advance, the District will continue to work with the resource agencies to ensure sufficient information is provided in future NEPA documents so USACE and resource agencies can achieve compliance for the study. The three-pronged study completion framework that is being employed for the project now enables the District to advance near-term localized actions that are less complex and able to achieve full environmental compliance to bring relief to communities in the near term while keeping the comprehensive plan on the table for future analysis when funds are provided to do so.

- *Need for greater integration of proposed structural measures into existing neighborhood waterfronts to reduce impacts on aesthetics, viewsheds and recreation*.

  Response: USACE acknowledges that the Action Alternative includes structural measures that may either disrupt or enhance existing viewscapes, depending on their location, scale, and surrounding context. Structural features could affect scenic byways, alter or obstruct residential views, and restrict access to historic coastal sites (USACE 2019). While aesthetic valuation, defined as public judgments based on visual appearance and emotional response, is being collected through ongoing stakeholder engagement, it was not used to determine the preliminary impact rating. However, it will inform later refinements.

  To support this evaluation, the New York District conducted an initial analysis of visual effects using aerial imagery, field observations, and viewshed modeling. This analysis considered visibility from residential neighborhoods and roadways, the influence of topography and vegetation, and the presence of built structures. Baseline conditions were established through an inventory of existing landscape character, visual quality, and viewer groups.

  Although the implementation of structural measures may alter the existing visual environment, particularly natural and cultural landscape compositions, they are also expected to mitigate long-term visual and physical impacts from coastal storms by reducing the severity of flood damage to both residences and historically significant sites.

  To assess potential visual impacts to historic resources, the New York District performed a preliminary identification of known cultural properties following guidance from the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office (2004), the New York Archaeological Council, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (2005), the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, and the USACE NYNJHATS OSE Report (2022). Visual effects are considered under both NEPA and Section 106 reviews; however, the presence of a visual effect does not necessarily constitute an adverse effect under federal regulation.

  The Seaward Alignment for the Harlem River waterfront places the majority of its features within the river itself, thereby mitigating the severity of visual impacts to residents and cultural resources along the shoreline. Because the alignment is located offshore and largely detached from historic buildings or structures on land, the new features are visually distant from most sensitive viewpoints and do not introduce dominant elements into the foreground of historic settings. This spatial separation significantly reduces the potential for adverse aesthetic or obstructive visual effects criteria and the less obtrusive visual profile avoids introducing new vertical elements into historically significant pedestrian corridors or parks.

  USACE recognizes that the Landward Alignment proposes the construction of a substantial vertical floodwall, ranging from 7 to 12 feet in height, along an inland corridor within the historic Harlem street grid. This configuration places the alignment in close proximity to sensitive cultural resources, including Harlem River Houses, Holcombe Rucker Park, Rangel Houses, P.S. 46, Polo Grounds Towers, Colonial Park Houses, which are integral to the neighborhood's cultural and historic landscape. Unlike the Seaward Alignment, which is distanced from historic resources by placement in the river, the Landward Alignment introduces a permanent physical and visual barrier within the pedestrian and urban context of the Harlem River's waterfront-adjacent neighborhoods. These effects are considered both aesthetic and obstructive under the visual criteria guidance. The alignment's scale and placement in the line-of-sight from culturally significant resources and community spaces results in moderate to high adverse visual impacts, despite the relatively minor footprint of occlusion areas in technical terms. The barrier's height, uniformity, and permanence exacerbate these effects, marking a distinct contrast with the historic urban landscape. More significantly, the vertical massing of the floodwall along the historic grid introduces a prominent visual intrusion into public viewsheds. This includes views from adjacent streets, parks, and

residential buildings that have traditionally maintained relatively open vistas to the Harlem River. The floodwall would sever the visual and spatial relationship between land and water, a connection that has historically defined the neighborhood's interaction with the waterfront. In doing so, it compromises the integrity of the historic setting, diminishes the appreciation of surrounding architecture, of spaces such as Holcombe Rucker Park.

As of this public release, this represents an initial screening-level analysis that will be refined in future project phases, with greater integration of stakeholder feedback to address aesthetics, viewshed continuity, and recreational access as part of design development.

- *Concern for remaining areas with existing coastal storm risk unaddressed by current plan features.*

  Response: This interim response will be followed by future reports to address remaining areas of coastal storm risk. At present, the intent is to submit a report to Congress coinciding with the Water Resources Development Acts, approximately every two (2) years.

- *Concern regarding length of time needed for design and construction (6 and 14 years, respectively) and expressed the need to accelerate implementation of less complex features as quickly as possible for highly flood prone areas.*

  Response: The need for the study derives from the significant and widespread damage to communities, infrastructure, and the economy caused by coastal storms throughout the study area. The recommendation and implementation of projects is subject to multiple factors, including but not limited to the availability of existing data, complexity of the analyses, public feedback and support, and the availability of funds. As actionable element projects become sufficiently designed and supported for recommendation, multiple projects could be implemented concurrently, subject to the availability of funding. The three-pronged study completion framework takes advantage of Federal legislative cycles to implement near-term localized actions that are informed by a comprehensive analysis.

  The team presents in this Draft Integrated Interim Response FR and EA for Actionable Elements that the Oakwood Beach Actionable Element and the East Riser Actionable Element are anticipated to be ready for a potential WRDA 2026, while the Harlem River Actionable Element is more likely to be ready for a future WRDA, subject to the availability of funds.

  As the team pursues analyses to recommend a comprehensive project to manage the region’s coastal storm risk and increase coastal resiliency, subject to the availability of funds, more actionable elements may be identified for authorization in advance of the comprehensive project.

- *Concern that advancing the plan to construction may be delayed or stopped due to lack of non-federal sponsor support, Congressional authorization, funding, etc.*

  Response: The risk is always present that funding lapses will delay the study or project, as has happened in the past on this study.

- *Concern regarding funding and assurance that the plans features will be properly operated and adequately maintained into the future.*

  Response: Operations and maintenance are a non-federal responsibility. Non-federal sponsors and partners have provided feedback on assumptions made by USACE on the full scope of what operations

and maintenance might entail (for example, staffing required for deployable floodwalls or operations of tide gates). USACE is committed to identifying the full scope of operations and maintenance during the study phase so that non-federal sponsors can make informed decisions on supporting an alternative, knowing what will be required for proper operation and adequate maintenance.

- *Significant concerns with the Storm Surge Barriers and their potential impact on natural resources.*

  Response: Due to the scale of the solution proposed in the Tier 1 (Programmatic) EIS the District implemented a phased approach to the analysis whereby a framework solution was identified, and further analysis was recommended to inform design while ensuring environmental acceptability. A number of additional analyses were identified that would be carried out as the study progressed before reaching a final recommended plan. Those specifically related to the storm surge barriers include refinement of the ADCIRC modeling, verification of the storm surge gate geometry and update AdH modeling, advancement of the NYBEM (New York Bight Ecological Model) to incorporate more detailed modeling inputs, closed gate modeling, animal movement modeling and contaminant tracking modeling. This continues to be the District intent, to advance investigations in consultation with the public and resources agencies, when funds are allocated to move the study of the comprehensive plan forward. No storm surge barriers are included in the Actionable Elements at this time.

- *How will the District avoid impacts to Superfund sites or potential release of hazardous substances given the highly urban environment?*

  Response: During the Feasibility Phase of any Study, USACE reviews readily available information from Federal, State, and/or Local databases to determine the risk of encountering hazardous, toxic, and radioactive waste (HTRW), as defined by the Comprehensive Environmental Response and Liabilities Act (CERCLA, also known as Superfund). As the project advances to the Preconstruction Engineering and Design (PED) phase, USACE performs a subsurface investigation to further characterize the subsurface conditions along the project footprint. This investigation will inform any potential HTRW risks associated with construction and implementation of the proposed project. While encountering HTRW is always a risk in any Study, particularly in the New York Metropolitan Area, coordination with Federal and State agencies is crucial to further ensure no adverse effects to, and from, Superfund sites, or otherwise known contamination sites, as a result of project implementation. Should HTRW be identified during any phase of the project, it is USACE policy to avoid it as practicable. If HTRW avoidance is not possible, it will be the responsibility of the project's nonfederal sponsor (in this case, NJDEP, NYSDEC, NYCDEP, and NYSDOS) to provide a clean site for the project, using 100% non-federal, non-project funds, in accordance with Engineering Regulation (ER) 1165-2-132.

- *I would like to suggest that the USACE consider constructing a tidal surge barrier further upstream in the Hackensack River, specifically to provide flood protection for the upstream communities. There should/could be a location further upstream where the river narrows and would require a narrower and less expensive surge barrier than the harbor-wide surge barrier plan.*

  Response: USACE considered a tidal surge barrier for Hackensack River in the 2022 Draft Feasibility Report (page 196 and Figure 47 of the 2022 report; also, Sub-Appendix B2, Annex H from the 2022 report). The Hackensack River barrier may be evaluated and considered further, pending general interest and subject to the availability of funding, in future responses to the study authority.

- *Request for USACE to coordinate TSP in East Harlem with agencies currently working on projects/plans in the area like: NYSEDC, 107th St Pier and East River Esplanade, Harlem River Manhattan Greenway, MOCEJ, AdaptNYC, CSC, DPR, Vision for Resilient East Harlem.*

Response: The study team, which includes the New York District, NJDEP, NYSDEC, NYCDEP, and NYSDOS, has analyzed the best available information needed to develop the three Actionable Elements, including the Harlem River Actionable Element, described in this Draft Integrated Interim Response FR and EA for Actionable Elements. During this analysis, it became clear that the Harlem River Actionable Element will not be sufficiently developed or detailed to support USACE design maturity requirements within the timeline for inclusion in a Chief of Engineer's Report, which could be considered by Congress for authorization in a potential Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2026.The New York District, NYSDEC, and NYCDEP believe robust, meaningful public coordination and additional engineering analyses are needed to ensure broader efforts on the Harlem River are evaluated, and to thoroughly coordinate with other government agencies about their plans for the Harlem River. The intent is to continue developing this site for inclusion in a future Interim Feasibility Report for potential authorization in a future WRDA, subject to the availability of funds.

- *Request for Bronx side of Harlem River to have similar greenway promenade designs and waterfront access as on the Manhattan side*

  Response: The Bronx side of the Harlem River is under consideration for CSRM measures in the overall Comprehensive Plan, of which this report is an interim response to. As the Study advances, there may be opportunities to study near-term localized CSRM measures on the Bronx side of the Harlem River, subject to the future availability of funds; however, any plans for a greenway, promenade, or other recreational-only feature would be best discussed with your local representatives.

4 INTERIM RESPONSE AGENCY ENGAGEMENT AND PUBLIC OUTREACH STRATEGY

4.1 BACKGROUND

Feedback from the public, resource agencies, and USACE senior leaders following the September 2022 release of the Draft Integrated Feasibility Report and Tier 1 (Programmatic) Environmental Impact Statement clearly indicated the need for a new strategic direction for study completion. Much of this feedback highlighted the region's critical need for near-term localized actions to manage coastal storm flood risk, and concerns about the ability of the USACE Civil Works process to maximize responsiveness to Federal budgetary and legislative cycles, working as a complement – not replacement for – a comprehensive plan. Similar concerns were raised related to how current Federal law and USACE policy could support timely construction of a coastal storm risk management project. Understanding these concerns, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works), HQUSACE, and the USACE North Atlantic Division issued guidance in 2024 and 2025 that reshaped the study scope and the strategy for study completion. This interim response to the study authority recommending near-term localized actions represents a first step in the study completion framework designed to bring coastal storm risk management solutions to communities in the HATS study area.

4.2 STAKEHOLDER ASSESSMENT

The areas of the Actionable Elements encompass a diverse range of stakeholders with significant interests in coastal resilience. These include the residents and business owners within communities potentially impacted by coastal storms and flooding. Crucially, the success of the Actionable Elements relies on strong partnerships with local and regional governmental entities, including state agencies in both New York and New Jersey, as well as the County of Bergen and the City of New York. USACE is committed to actively engaging with community organizations who represent the voices and needs of local residents, both those with a local/regional focus (Table 1) and those focused on the study area as a whole (Table 2).

Furthermore, collaboration with the non-Federal partners, infrastructure owners and operators, environmental advocacy groups (Table 3), and academic institutions will be essential. Effective engagement with all of these stakeholders – from individual citizens to large institutions – is paramount to ensuring the Actionable Elements address critical needs, minimize impacts, align with the overall NYNJHAT Study, and build lasting resilience across the region.

Table 7: Locally/Regionally focused community organizations

Harlem River Actionable Element	East Riser Actionable Element	Oakwood Beach Actionable Element
South Bronx Unite	Hackensack Riverkeeper	Staten Island Urban Center
WE ACT	Meadowlands Conservation Trust	
Harlem River Working Group		
Civitas		

NOTE: Additional organizations to be identified as the Study advances through public engagement.

Table 8: Broadly focused community organizations

New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA)
El Puente
The Brotherhood Sister Sol
New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance
Resilient Coastal Communities Project

Table 9: Environmental advocacy groups

Riverkeeper
NY-NJ Baykeeper
Clean Ocean Action
Surfrider Foundation
Billion Oyster Project
Hudson River Foundation

NOTE: Additional organizations to be identified as the Study advances through public engagement.

4.3 COOPERATING/PARTICIPATING AGENCY AND TRIBAL IDENTIFICATION AND ROLES

There are five Cooperating Agencies for this study and one Participating Agency. The team will hold periodic conference calls with the Cooperating and Participating Agencies (monthly to quarterly depending on need) to provide updates on how the study is proceeding, with details of the alternatives and ongoing analysis as it progresses. Cooperating/Participating Agencies are asked to provide data, input, and comments or recommendations on the proposed alternatives and analysis, in advance of the comments that would be provided as part of an official review of the Draft Integrated Interim Feasibility Report and Environmental Assessment for Actionable Elements.

Cooperating Agencies:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA)
US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
U.S. Coast Guard
National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)
National Park Service (NPS)

Participating Agencies:

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Federal Agencies (in addition to Cooperating and Participating Agencies):

FEMA Sandy Regional Infrastructure Resilience Coordination Group
Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT)
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (USHUD)

Native American Tribes:

Delaware Tribe of Indians
Delaware Nation
Stockbridge Munsee Community Band of Mohican Indians
Shinnecock Indian Nation
Shawnee

Recognizing the unique government-to-government relationship with Federally recognized Tribes and acknowledging the historical and ongoing connection of the Delaware Tribe of Indians, Delaware Nation, and Stockbridge Munsee Community Band of Mohican Indians to the lands and resources within the study area, consistent and meaningful engagement is paramount. Note the proposed Actionable Elements are not within the expressed area of interest for the Shinnecock Indian Nation and the Shawnee Tribe. Coordination with these Indian entities will continue for any future Comprehensive Plan and/or any future Actionable Elements identified within their area of interest.

The PDT is committed to a collaborative approach with these Tribal Nations throughout all phases of the study, including the development and implementation of the Actionable Elements. This engagement will be guided by principles of respect, transparency, and mutual understanding.

A summary of Tribal input received, along with a description of how that input was considered in the decision-making process, will be included in an appendix to the Final Integrated Interim Feasibility Report. The PDT is committed to building and maintaining a strong, collaborative relationship with the Indian entities throughout the duration of the NYNJHAT Study.

4.4 STUDY TEAM AND NON-FEDERAL PARTNERS ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Study Team and non-Federal partners are responsible for carrying out public reviews and creating opportunities for public and Tribal involvement. Below, the responsibilities of the study team and non-Federal partners are described.

NYNJHATS Team:

- In conjunction with the non-Federal partners, determine dates for public meetings and review periods
- Develop and review public meeting outreach materials
- Participate in all public, Tribal, and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) meetings
- Compile and respond to public comments
- Maintain active project email
- Send notification emails informing parties of upcoming engagement opportunities or review periods

Non-Federal Partners:

- Provide input to public outreach schedule, including blackout dates
- Participate in public meetings and information sessions to the maximum extent possible
- Provide input on which community organizations can/should be included in communications
- Recommend locations for in-person events and provide contacts if applicable
- Collaborate on, and support, this public outreach strategy
- Review materials that will be presented publicly

4.5 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

With regards to the complex nature of the stakeholder assessment for the Actionable Elements, the following goals and objectives were identified:

GOAL 1: Transparently explain the USACE role and Actionable Element study purpose/process
Objectives

- Ensure information is clearly presented to the public
- Communicate the next steps in both this Actionable Elements study as well as the overall NYNJHAT comprehensive study
- Maintain updated webpage social media, and story map
- Hold public information sessions

GOAL 2: Provide opportunities for all communities to meaningfully participate in the study process
Objectives

- Offer a variety of engagement formats (virtual, in-person, asynchronous)
- Establish a mechanism for receiving public comments and demonstrate how feedback is being considered throughout the study process.

- In addition to general and regional outreach, conduct targeted outreach to community organizations within the study area

GOAL 3: Understand community concerns and interests
Objectives
- Hold in-person and/or hybrid public meetings in or near proposed Actionable Elements
- Obtain the perspective of the community on the potential Actionable Elements, as well as other suggested opportunities for future Actionable Element development.
- Provide study materials and platform for comment on webpage

GOAL 4: Understand Tribal concerns and interests
Objectives
- Build and sustain trust-based, respectful government-to-government consultation with Tribal Nations by initiating early engagement.
- Conduct listening sessions and culturally appropriate workshops when requested, to understand and record Tribal concerns, priorities, and Traditional Cultural Properties.
- Incorporate Tribal feedback into planning, environmental compliance, and project design by reflecting input in NEPA documents.

GOAL 5: Establish clear, consistent expectations of the Actionable Element study process
Objectives
- Host introductory public information sessions prior to release of Draft Integrated Interim Report
- Maintain a regularly-updated webpage and story map
- Maintain a dedicated email address for comment and inquiry

4.6 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The general public, encompassing residents, business owners, and visitors within the study area, represents a critical stakeholder group. Their lived experiences, local knowledge, and potential exposure to coastal risks are essential considerations throughout the development and implementation of the Actionable Elements. However, the District also seeks public input on a broader range of potential impacts, including changes to land use, recreational access, scenic views, economic activity, and overall community character. Engagement with the general public will be multi-faceted and prioritize accessibility and inclusivity.

Effective public involvement is a cornerstone of the study and is essential for the successful implementation of the Actionable Elements. This section details the strategies the study team will employ to ensure accessible, transparent, and inclusive opportunities for the general public – including residents, business owners, and visitors – to learn about the study, provide feedback, and contribute to the decision-making process.

To facilitate broad awareness and understanding of the study, the study team will establish and maintain a comprehensive online presence. A dedicated study webpage (see Section 10) will serve as the central repository for all study-related information, including fact sheets, maps, reports, meeting schedules, and frequently asked questions. This webpage will be regularly updated to reflect the latest developments. Complementing the webpage, the study team (via District Public Affairs Office) will actively engage with the public through social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), and Instagram, using these channels to disseminate updates, announce events, and solicit comments. A public email list will also be maintained, offering subscribers regular newsletters with key study updates and announcements; sign-up information will be readily available on the study webpage. Proactive outreach to local media outlets will further ensure broad awareness of the study's progress. All key documents will be available in accessible formats (e.g., large print, screen-reader

compatible) upon request, and translations into commonly spoken languages within the study area will be considered to maximize engagement.

The study team will host a series of public engagement events throughout the study process. Beginning in July 2025, virtual public information sessions will be held to inform the public of the approved approach and to further respond to any questions, concerns, or considerations for Actionable Elements. These will be followed by in-person or hybrid public meetings in or near the area where the District has proposed Actionable Elements, allowing for in-depth discussion of potential impacts and benefits with stakeholders. To broaden participation, additional virtual town hall meetings will be hosted, providing a convenient remote option for the public to receive updates and ask questions. All meeting materials, including presentations and handouts, will be posted on the study webpage. A dedicated email address will be monitored for public comments and questions (see Section 9 for more information on comments).

After receiving funds from an approved Additional Resources Request in January 2025, reoccurring communication continued with the non-Federal partners with the intention to meet with resource agency partners, Cooperating, and Participating Agencies in the near-term to share the efforts that the team has been working on throughout the last several months. An email was sent to Agency partners on 23 April 2025, to communicate the change in direction for the study and request availability for an Agency Coordination Meeting, which was successfully held on 20 May 2025. A public press release has been issued to reflect the new path forward and intent to find and investigate Actionable Elements for accelerated recommendation in a potential WRDA ’26, and an update has been posted to the study webpage. Social media posts and email updates will occur as the Study advances, including public meeting announcements.

The District scheduled two (2) early virtual public information sessions in order to inform the public of the approved approach and to further respond to any questions, concerns, or considerations for Actionable Elements prior to release of the Draft Integrated Interim Response FR and EA, as well as record an asynchronous version to be available on the study webpage.

After release of the Draft Integrated Interim Response FR and EA for Actionable Elements, the District began a 30-day public review period starting on July 24, 2025 and ending on August 25, 2025, during which in-person or hybrid public meetings will be held in or near the municipalities that the District has proposed Actionable Elements. Language interpretation will be provided where necessary for in-person meetings. During this time, virtual meetings will also be held for the general public throughout the General Study Area.

The study team will continue meeting with the non-Federal partners on a weekly basis, to share updates as well as continue their involvement, throughout this phase of the study.

Table 10: Estimated milestone schedule through the end of the Draft Report public comment period

Milestone/Task	Date Start	Date End
Resource Agency Coordination Meeting	5/20/25	5/20/25
District discussion with Acting ASA(CW)	6/26/25	6/27/25
Brief to members of Congress	7/22/25	7/22/25
Virtual Public Information Sessions	7/23/25	7/23/25
Draft Report Release	7/24/25	7/24/25
Public Comment Period	7/24/25	8/25/25
Brief(s) to NYC Community Boards	7/28/25	8/1/25
Public Meetings	7/28/25	8/23/25

Comments received during the public comment period will be documented in an appendix of the Decision Document for transparency. Commentors should be made aware that their names and/or email addresses may

be obtained via Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. All comments received during this period will receive a response, including how the feedback was used in the report, if applicable. Depending on the quantity of received, comments may be grouped for response or may receive individual responses.

All public comments received will receive consideration by the study team, however comments received outside of the public comment period may not be included in the public comment appendix. Response to comments will be a shared study team responsibility with Project Management leading the effort to assign teammates to respond.

The study will continue to maintain an active email account and will respond to inquiries regularly.

The New York District maintains a study webpage for public consumption through the USACE website. The webpage link has been and will continue to be provided at all public, Interagency, and Tribal meetings, and wherever else appropriate.

The study team will provide updates on study progress and significant decisions to the webpage and via email. Language will be easy to understand and translated to non-English languages when appropriate. The non-Federal partners will also share study updates via their organization websites, email listservs, and social media.

The Project Manager is responsible for coordinating webpage updates with New York District Public Affairs Office. The updates will be drafted by the Plan Formulation and Environmental teams.

Study Webpage: https://www.nan.usace.army.mil/NYNJHATS

Study Email: NYNJHarbor.TribStudy@usace.army.mil