DRAFT

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

FOR

PROPOSED WATER AND SEWER DISTRICT OFFICE AND MAINTENANCE FACILITY (HANCOCK COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI) DECLARATION NO. FEMA – 1604 – DR – MS

Prepared for

HANCOCK COUNTY WATER & SEWER DISTRICT
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONT.)

LIST OF FIGURES

1.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck the Mississippi coast and caused extensive damage to buildings and infrastructure in Bay St. Louis and other communities along the coast, through heavy winds, rainfall, and an extremely high saltwater tidal surge of over 25 feet. The Hancock County Water & Sewer District (HCWSD) operations and maintenance/shop buildings that were located on Longfellow Road in Bay St. Louis were damaged beyond repair.

On August 30, 2005, President George W. Bush declared a major disaster for Hancock County as well as other counties in Mississippi and Alabama, and parishes in Louisiana, under the authority of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (P.L. 93-288), as amended. Replacement of the HCWSD facilities was approved by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) on November 20, 2006

The Bay St. Louis area is characterized by single-family residences and commercial developments. The HCWSD facilities were located north of U.S. Highway 90; the operations building consisted of a modified residence while the maintenance/shop building was a metal-sided building constructed by HCWSD. Both structures were damaged by submergence in saltwater for over 2 days, as well as by accumulation of mud and debris, structural damage, and flooding-induced contamination.

HCWSD proposes to construct a new office and maintenance facility on Stennis Airport Road, north of Interstate-10 in Hancock County. The construction site is located in Section 6, Township 8 South, Range 14 West and comprises approximately 3.1 acres (Figure 1). The new facility will consist of an office building, a maintenance shop, driveway and parking, and an open laydown yard (Figure 2). The site plan includes a minimum 10-foot building set-back along the east and west sides of the property, and a 20-foot set-back along the north property line. These set-back areas will be landscaped or enhanced as needed to provide a visual buffer to the adjoining properties.

2.0 PURPOSE AND NEED

The proposed project is intended to provide improved access and service to the customers of HCWSD, through construction of an office and maintenance facility in a location that is more convenient to the District's customers, and also is closer to increased residential and commercial development. The HCWSD facilities that were located near U.S. Highway 90 in Bay St. Louis were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

The objectives of FEMA's Public Assistance (PA) Program are to reduce the impact of natural disasters on the built environment and to assist the affected community in recovering from the damage caused by those disasters.

The President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) has developed regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). These Federal regulations, set forth in Title 40, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Parts 1500-1508, require an evaluation of alternatives, and a discussion of the potential environmental impacts of a proposed Federal action, as part of the Environmental Assessment (EA) process. The FEMA regulations, which establish FEMA's process for implementing NEPA, are set forth in 44 CFR Subpart 10. This EA was prepared in accordance with FEMA's regulations as required under NEPA. As part of this NEPA review the requirements of other environmental laws and executive orders are addressed.

The new facility is necessary to replace the functions performed by the old facilities on behalf of HCWSD customers. A new location is required to meet the directive that utility facilities be re-built in non-flood hazard areas, with a minimum finished floor elevation of 21 feet above sea level. HCWSD customers cannot be adequately served without operations and maintenance/shop buildings necessary to provide basic water and sewer services. Hancock County must serve local families and businesses, as the area continues to recover from Hurricane Katrina.

3.0 ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS

Three alternative approaches to the proposed project location were considered by HCWSD. Alternative 1 was the No Action alternative; Alternative 2 involved reconstruction of

the HCWSD facility at a different location; and Alternative 3 was the proposed action. Each of these approaches is described below.

3.1 ALTERNATIVE 1 – NO ACTION

The No Action alternative was dismissed because it would involve re-construction of the storm-damaged facilities at the original sites in Bay St. Louis. Those sites lie within a flood hazard zone, and HCWSD has been mandated to re-build its offices and maintenance facilities out of flood hazard zones.

3.2 ALTERNATIVE 2 – ALTERNATIVE LOCATION

An alternative site on Texas Flat Road was also considered for this project. That site was dismissed from consideration because it is located near residential areas and experiences greater traffic congestion. The 18-acre parcel is lower in elevation and occurs adjacent to the 100-year floodplain; attaining the 21-foot finished floor elevation would require extensive earthwork and would result in a less-accessible facility at a much higher cost.

3.3 ALTERNATIVE 3 – PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed project site occurs above the 500-year flood boundary and is located in an area that will remain accessible to the public and District personnel even after a major storm event such as Hurricane Katrina. In addition, the selected site is nearer to existing HCWSD water and wastewater infrastructure adjacent to the Airport, and it is located in or near an area that will remain commercial/light industrial. This site is more amenable to being elevated to comply with the County's new finished floor elevation criterion, while providing good access to the facility for customers and employees.

4.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND IMPACTS

4.1 ZONING AND LAND USE

The proposed project (Alternative 3) occurs in an area that is already used for light industrial and commercial purposes. Also, the Hancock County school system has located two public schools to the northwest of this site; these schools create a buffer to residential areas along

Texas Flat Road. Lands east and south of this location are undeveloped, but are susceptible to being developed for commercial use in the future. Hancock County has approved the proposed site as being consistent with planning and land use for this area.

Alternative 1 (No Action alternative) would have no impact on land use, because it would involve reconstruction at the existing facility sites, which are located in urbanized Bay St. Louis.

Alternative 2 (Texas Flat Road) would have a minor impact on land use, since the area already contains some commercial enterprises, mixed with residential development. Use of this location would increase the trend toward non-residential use and would tend to displace residents to other areas. Use of this site would be consistent with planning and land use in the project area.

4.2 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

4.2.1. Terrestrial Habitat

Very little vegetation occurs on the uplands at the proposed site, which is characterized by a gravel/shell surface or re-contoured terrain. Dominant plant species are slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*), water oak (*Quercus nigra*), cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica*), blackberry (*Rubus* sp.), and Cherokee rose (*Rosa laevigata*). This terrestrial plant community provides low-quality habitat for wildlife, which includes deer, raccoon, rabbit, and various rodents, reptiles, and birds.

Approximately 1.92 acres of the 3.12-acre property are uplands, while the remainder (1.20 acres) of the parcel contains wetlands regulated under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. No terrestrial habitat remains on the existing facility sites (Alternative 1), while the Alternative 2 site is lightly wooded and provides low-quality wildlife habitat.

4.2.2 Wetlands

Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands, requires Federal agencies to take action to minimize the loss of wetlands. Evaluations of proposed activities in jurisdictional wetlands include consideration of the extent to which wetland impacts would be avoided and minimized,

and how unavoidable impacts would be mitigated. The NEPA process also requires Federal agencies to consider both direct and indirect impacts to wetlands that may result from Federal actions.

Barry A. Vittor & Associates, Inc. delineated jurisdictional wetlands within the HCWSD project site, in accordance with the 1987 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers "Wetland Delineation manual." Wetland boundaries conformed closely to the limits of disturbance and fill associated with the old gas well service pad, as shown in Figure 4. Approximately 1.92 acres of the 3.12-acre property are uplands, while the remainder (1.20 acres) represent wetlands regulated under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Those wetlands comprise low- to medium-quality habitat characterized by wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*), slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*), bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*), sweetbay (*Magnolia virginiana*), gallberry (*Ilex glabra*), and green briar (*Smilax laurifolia*). Wetland study data sheets are included as Appendix A. The initial phase of this project will affect no wetlands, but Phase II will involve filling up to 0.5 acre of wetlands. Construction of the yard area in Phase II was authorized by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers under Nationwide Permit 39, on May 30, 2007. A copy of this authorization is provided in Appendix B.

No wetland fill would be needed at either the No Action (Alternative 1) or Texas Flat Road (Alternative 2) sites. Mitigation for the 0.5 acre of wetland fill associated with Phase II will be accomplished through purchase of mitigation bank credits at a 3:1 ratio, for a total purchase of 1.5 credits of wet pine woods mitigation bank credits.

4.2.3 Endangered Species

In accordance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, the project area was evaluated for the potential occurrences of Federally listed threatened or endangered species. The ESA requires any Federal agency that funds, authorizes or carries out an action to ensure that their action is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered or threatened species (including plant species) or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitats (FEMA 1996).

Vittor & Associates inspected the proposed project site (Alternative 3) for species listed by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) as Threatened or Endangered. Target species were gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*), red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*), bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), black bear (*Ursus a. luteolus*), and Louisiana quillwort (*Isoetes louisianensis*). There is no habitat present that is suitable for any of these species, nor for other species of concern in this county (*eg*., woodstork, black pinesnake). The proposed plan would have no impact on protected species.

The USFWS Mississippi Field Office in Jackson, Mississippi provided written concurrence on May 31, 2007 that the proposed project would have no impact on Federally listed species (see Appendix B).

Alternative 1 (No Action) would involve no impacts to threatened or endangered species, since the area is already fully developed and contains no natural habitat.

The Texas Flat Road site (Alternative 2) contains natural habitats that are similar to those at the preferred site, although there are more non-wet pinewoods at Texas Flat Road. No protected species have been reported at this site, nor is there any critical habitat designated at this location; Alternative 2 would result in no impact to protected species.

4.3 GEOLOGY, SEISMICITY, AND SOILS

Soils in the Alternative 3 property and vicinity are depicted in the Hancock County (MS) soil map book (Figure 3); except for previously altered areas (such as the HCWSD site), the soils around Stennis Airport Road are classified as Guyton silt loam (Type Gu). This is a poorly drained soil typical of wet flats and drainageways, with slopes of 1 percent or less. Although hydric, Guyton soil is well-suited for slash pine, sweetgum, water oak, and pastureland.

For Alternative 3 (proposed action), soil impacts during construction will be confined to the immediate construction site, through use of BMPs such as hay bales and silt fences. Phase II of Alternative 3 would disturb soils in the project. For Phase II, soils in the wetland impact area would be covered by gravel/shell fill material.

The Alternative 2 location is characterized by Saucier fine sandy loam soils with 2 to 5 percent slopes, (Type SaB) near Texas Flat Road; soils south of the property are classified as Beauregard silt loam (Type Be). Alternative 2 would disturb soils in the project footprint during pre-construction site preparation, but otherwise would not have short- or long-term impacts on geology or soils. For Alternative 2, soil impacts during construction will be confined to the immediate construction site, through use of BMPs such as hay bales and silt fences. The existing facility sites (Alternative 1) have no undisturbed surface soils, and construction of new facilities on the sites would not have short- or long-term impacts to soils or geology.

Executive Order (EO) 12699 directs Federal agencies to incorporate cost-effective seismic safety measures in all new buildings that are constructed, leased, assisted, or regulated by the Federal Government (Seismic Safety) requirements. Those requirements include use of nationally recognized private sector standards and practices in building construction to provide adequately for seismic safety. EO 12699 considers seismic hazards in various areas of the country, according to Federal maps of regional seismic activity. Hancock County is relatively inactive tectonically. The U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) places Hancock County area within the lowest seismic risk classification for the United States (http://earthquake.usgs.gov/research/hazmaps/products_data/images/nshm_us02.gif). There are no unique needs for special seismic standards or practices that have been identified for Hancock County by any state or Federal agency. Local building codes provide adequately for seismic safety.

4.4 WATER RESOURCES

4.4.1 Water Quality

The Clean Water Act (CWA) is a 1977 amendment to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972, which set the basic structure for regulating discharges of pollutants to waters of the United States. Section 404 of the CWA establishes a program to regulate discharge of dredged and fill material into waters of the United States, including wetlands. Section 401 of

the CWA establishes State Certification of water quality. Anyone who wishes to obtain a federal permit for any activity that may result in a discharge to navigable waters of the U.S. must first obtain a state Section 401 water quality certification to ensure the project will comply with State water quality standards. Section 401 water quality certification is included in Nationwide Permit 39, under which the proposed action has been authorized by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

There are no surface waters at the proposed project site, although the property does drain to the north, toward Mallini Bayou (Figure 3). A drainage ditch along the front of the property collects local runoff, and is periodically inundated. Portions of the wetland on the north side of the project property also hold water. Water quality impacts during construction will include sediment resuspension by stormwater-induced erosion. These effects will be minimized through use of best management practices (BMPs) such as hay bales and silt fences. The proposed plan maximizes permeable surfaces, including vegetated buffers around the perimeter of the property and gravel staging/parking (Figure 2). These features will minimize post-construction water quality impacts related to stormwater runoff.

Alternatives 1 and 2 would have similar construction-related impacts, through use of appropriate BMPs. Re-building at the original facility sites (Alternative 1) would result in no new impacts on water quality. Alternative 2 (Texas Flat Road) also would involve no direct impacts to water quality, although this area drains northward into the Jourdan River. Project design would be the same at the Alternative 2 site, and would provide the same level of runoff treatment as the proposed site.

4.4.2 Hydrology and Ground Water

The Stennis Airport Road property has an elevation of +13 to +15 feet above sea level. The land consists of a built-up pad approximately 2 feet higher than the adjacent natural grade. It drains northward toward Mallini Bayou but has very little slope. The water table in the unimproved parts of the property is within 18 inches of the surface most of the year, but this project would have no impact on water resources of the area.

Alternative 1 would cause no impacts on surface or ground water resources; the sites contain no ponds or streams and the water table occurs at a depth of over 3 feet.

The Alternative 2 site slopes steeply toward Texas Flat Road but contains no streams or drainageways that carry surface waters. The water tale is generally below 2 feet, and would not be affected by this project.

4.4.3 Floodplains

Executive Order (EO) 11988 requires Federal agencies to take action to minimize occupancy and modification of the floodplain. Specifically, EO 11988 prohibits Federal agencies from funding construction in the 100-year floodplain unless there are no practicable alternatives. FEMA's regulations for complying with EO 11988 are promulgated in 44 CFR Part 9.

The Bay St. Louis area and Hancock County participate in the National Flood Insurance Program. The proposed project site will not impact FEMA's flood hazard zone maps.

The proposed HCWSD site (Alternative 3) is located above the 500-year floodplain and is classified as Zone C, as depicted in Figure 5.

The present HCWSD sites occur within the Hurricane Katrina impact zone and could be susceptible to future storm impacts. It is located within the 100-year floodplain as indicated in flood map panel No. 284254-0145 C.

Texas Flat Road occurs at the edge of the floodplain of the Jourdan River and was considered to represent a moderate flood hazard risk. Although this site is in Zone C (above the 500-year floodplain), it would require over 10 feet of fill in some areas, to achieve the 21-foot finished floor elevation requirement.

According to Katrina Recovery Maps showing Advisory Base Flood Elevation (ABFE) contours for Hancock County, the proposed HCWSD facility site and the alternative sites are within the ABFE (ABFE Maps MS-F9, MS-I7, and MS-H7).

4.5 CULTURAL RESOURCES

Cultural resources include archaeological or cultural sites, standing structures, and other historic properties considered to be eligible for or listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) mandates that Federal agencies consider the impact of their undertakings on historic properties within the project's area of potential effect (APE). If adverse effects on historic, archaeological, or cultural properties are identified, then agencies must attempt to avoid, minimize, or mitigate these impacts to resources considered important in our nation's history.

The Alternative 3 (proposed action) project site Phase I portion comprises disturbed, previously developed land (Phase I). Phase II would affect a portion of the wetland area on the non-disturbed north side of the project site, by covering the existing ground with fill. Concurrence of no impact for Alternative 3 has been requested from the Mississippi Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). A concurrence request letter was sent to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH) on January 12, 2007 (see Appendix B). A request for concurrence of no impacts from the Mississippi Tribal Preservation Officer (THPO) was sent on June 13, 2007 (see Appendix B).

4.6 SOCIOECONOMICS

Construction of the new facilities would have similar socioeconomic effects for each of the three alternatives considered, since the level of employment (25 staff) would be the same regardless of location, and the layout and floor plan of the facility would also be the same. However, the cost of the new facility ($750,000 excluding land cost at the Alternative 3 site) would be higher at the Alternatives 1 and 2 locations, due to the new requirement that finished floor elevation be at 21 feet above sea level. Annual payroll would be approximately $800,000 and would be independent of location.

4.7 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

On February 11, 1994, President Clinton signed EO 12898, entitled "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations". The EO directs Federal agencies "to make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by

identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low income populations in the United States…"

There are few residences within 1 mile of the proposed (Alternative 3) project site. Those areas that are populated (Texas Flat Road, Nicola Road) are rural and are not characterized as comprising minority, elderly, or low-income populations.

Reconstruction of HCWSD's offices and maintenance facilities at the previous locations (Alternative 1) would present no new impacts to the surrounding community. Construction of a new facility at either the proposed site on Stennis Airport Road (Alternative 3) or the Alternative 2 site on Texas Flat Road would have no adverse impact on minority or disadvantaged communities, since both locations are rural and generally undeveloped; neither site would constitute an impact on environmental justice.

4.8 AIR QUALITY

The Clean Air Act (CAA) requires that states adopt ambient air quality standards. The standards have been established in order to protect the public from potentially harmful amounts of pollutants. Under the CAA, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) establishes primary and secondary air quality standards. Primary air quality standards protect the public health, including the health of "sensitive populations, such as people with asthma, children, and older adults." Secondary air quality standards protect public welfare by promoting ecosystems health, and preventing decreased visibility and damage to crops and buildings. EPA has set national ambient air quality standards (NAAQS) for the following six criteria pollutants: ozone (O_3), particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$, PM_{10}), nitrogen dioxide (NO_2), carbon monoxide (CO), sulfur dioxide (SO_2), and lead (Pb). According to the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), the entire state of Mississippi is classified as in attainment, meaning that criteria air pollutants do not exceed the NAAQS (MDEQ, 2006).

The proposed project will involve no air emissions and therefore will have no impact on air quality, at any of the alternative sites. Construction-related air emissions would be temporary. Localized alterations to air quality would occur during construction. These effects would be due to exhaust emissions from diesel- and gasoline-powered equipment. Additional effects can be expected from dust entrainment at the construction site.

Depending upon the stage of completion, the following ranges of air emission rates would be experienced (these rates are based on 10-hour work days and include commuting effects):

Carbon monoxide	0.07 - 0.67 tons/day
Nitrogen oxide	0.02 - 0.44 tons/day
Sulfur dioxide	0.002 - 0.049 tons/day
Total organics	0.006 - 0.085 tons/day
Total Suspended Particulate	0.001 - 0.026 tons/day

There would be no air impacts directly associated with routine maintenance and operations of Alternatives 1, 2 or 3, other than localized alterations to air quality due to exhaust emissions from diesel- and gasoline-powered equipment and vehicles used in operations and commuting travel by employees.

4.9 HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

Hazardous substances are defined as any solid, liquid, contained gaseous or semisolid waste, or any combination of wastes that pose a substantial present or potential hazard to human health and the environment. Hazardous substances are primarily generated by industry, hospitals, research facilities, and the government. Improper management and disposal of hazardous substances can lead to pollution of groundwater or other drinking water supplies, and the contamination of surface water and soil. The primary Federal regulations for the management and disposal of hazardous substances are the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA).

The proposed HCWSD facility site (Alternative 3) was previously occupied by a natural gas production support facility and the adjacent lot (to the west of the HCWSD site) contains an inactive metering system. Vittor & Associates inspected the gas meter and pipeline system and determined that they have been properly closed. No recognizable hazardous materials or wastes were identified at the proposed project site during multiple site visits. During a Phase I inspection of the property by Vittor & Associates in November 2006, no evidence was found of hazardous materials or debris. An Environmental Data Resources (EDR) Hazardous Materials search of the Alternative 3 (proposed action) site was conducted June 14, 2007. The EDR search of available government records found that no mapped hazardous materials that are or have been stored at or located on the Alternative 3 site. The EDR search found that there is one (1) Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Information System (CERLIS) site within 0.5-mile of Alternative 3, but it is not a National Priority List (NPL) site.

The HCWSD facility will neither use nor produce any hazardous materials, and the proposed project will not present any risk of exposure to such materials. No hazardous materials have been reported for the existing facilities, nor is there a likelihood of such materials being present at the Texas Flat Road (Alternative 2) site, which consists of undeveloped woodland.

4.10 NOISE

The proposed site on Stennis Airport Road experiences periods of elevated noise levels due to aircraft takeoff and landing at Stennis International Airport. This effect of the airport is also seen at the Texas Flat Road property (Alternative 2). The proposed site is close to two public schools, and elevated noise levels occur during early morning and mid-afternoon hours, due to school bus and automobile traffic past this location. The U.S. Environmental Protection agency has determined that noise levels in residential areas should not exceed 55dBA, to prevent activity interference and annoyance outdoors. The Federal Highway Administration (FHA) has established standards for traffic noise impacts in 23 CFR Part 772, “Procedures for Abatement of Highway Traffic Noise and Construction Noise.” FHA models indicate that a doubling of traffic volume will increase highway noise levels by 3dBA. The proposed project will increase traffic on Stennis Airport Road by less than 10 percent, resulting in no noticeable increase in noise levels in the area. There are no residential noise receptors within 0.5 mile of this site.

The Alternative 2 location occurs in proximity to several residences, including some within 0.1 mile. The existing facilities (Alternative 1) are also near residential areas. However, the new facility will produce only minor noise levels, since it will contain administrative offices and enclosed maintenance shops.

4.11 SAFETY AND SECURITY

All three alternative sites are amenable to being made secure, by incorporating security fencing and alarms in the facility design. The existing facilities are in an urban setting near U.S. Hwy. 90, and can be provided with more-frequent police patrols if necessary. Alternative sites 2 and 3 are more rural, with less need for police protection. However, the Stennis Airport Road site is close to the airport and has access to airport security services, if needed. All of the sites have good access to other emergency response services (*ie*., fire protection, ambulance service).

4.12 PUBLIC SERVICES AND UTILITIES

The proposed project has access to and will tie into public utilities (electricity, water, sewer, natural gas, telephone), as do the existing facilities near U.S. Hwy. 90. The Alternative 2 site on Texas Flat Road does not presently have access to public sewerage treatment, but that service could be extended to that location by HCWSD. All three sites have access to garbage/trash pick-up services. Mississippi Power Co. serves area. No water well would be needed for Alternative 1, 2, or 3.

4.13 TRAFFIC

Operations at the HCWSD facility will employ 25 staff, including approximately 8 field personnel who will operate District vehicles in the County service area. Most employees are expected to travel to and from work separately, so the traffic count on Stennis Airport Road could increase by 66 vehicle trips per day. Based on the existing schools' traffic loads plus airport and adjacent business traffic, this increase will be less than 10 percent of the present count.

Alternatives 1 and 2 would also increase local traffic counts by about 66 trips per day. The percent increase in traffic at the U.S. Hwy. 90 sites would be much less than at the proposed

site, while the percent increase at Texas Flat Road would be much greater than at Stennis Airport Road. The net increase in traffic volume would not be significant at any of the three sites.

5.0 SUMMARY

The facility development plan provides for landscaping and enhancement of vegetated buffer areas on all four sides of the property, to minimize aesthetic impacts of the project.

The second phase of the proposed project will involve filling of approximately 0.5 acre of low- to medium-quality wetland. Mitigation for this impact will be accomplished through purchase of credits at an approved wetland mitigation bank that serves Hancock County.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

Development of the proposed project will result in negligible environmental impacts, primarily because the building site consists of a previously developed or altered property. No wetland impacts would occur in conjunction with construction of buildings, driveways, or parking areas. Subsequent preparation of the inventory laydown area will involve wetland impacts; approximately 0.5 acre of low- to medium-quality wetland habitat will be filled to provide appropriate grades for ground storage.

No endangered species will be affected by this project, nor will any area designated as Critical Habitat be impacted.

The project site occurs above the 500-year flood zone and the construction plan complies with Hancock County design requirements for floor elevation, structural performance, and drainage.

No cultural resources will be affected by this project nor are there any sites listed in the National Register in the vicinity of the property.

7.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Monthly meetings of the Hancock County Water & Sewer District Board of Commissioners are always advertised and are open to the public. At the August 18, 2006 meeting of the Board of Commissioners, the proposed relocation of the HCWSD facility was discussed and a single bid to construct the proposed new office and maintenance facilities was offered by Miller Acquisitions & Developments, Inc. A motion was made and seconded to accept the bid, and a vote to approve the motion was passed unanimously.

The public will be invited to comment on this proposed action, as described in this Draft EA. This public notice will be published on July 11, 2009. The Draft EA will be made available during this comment period. After the public notice has expired, all comments will be addressed.

8.0 LIST OF PREPARERS

This Environmental Assessment was prepared by the following individuals:

Dr. Barry A Vittor; Barry A. Vittor & Associates, Inc.

Dr. Vittor has over 35 years experience in evaluating environmental resource and development impacts in the Mississippi coastal area. He has prepared numerous environmental assessments and environmental impact statements for private and governmental entities throughout the eastern United States.

Timothy Thibaut, M.S.; Barry A. Vittor & Associates, Inc.

Mr. Thibaut has 15 years experience in conducting environmental analysis of development along the Gulf coast. He is expert in the application of NEPA guidelines to environmental assessments and has prepared numerous environmental reports including environmental impact statements, for private and governmental entities.

9.0 CONSULTATIONS AND REFERENCES

The following agencies were contacted regarding the proposed project:

- U.S. Department of the Interior
  U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Jackson Field Office

6578 Dogwood View Parkway, Suite A
Jackson, MS 39213
(601) 321-1139

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District

  Attn: Mr. John McFayden

  P.O. Box 2288

  Mobile, AL 36628-0001
  (251) 690-3222

- Mississippi Department of Archives and History

  P.O. Box 571

  Jackson, MS 39205-0571

  (601) 576-6850

- Mississippi Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO)

  Attn: Kenneth H. Carleton

  Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians
  P.O. Box 6257
  Choctaw, MS 39350
  (601) 650-7316

A letter of consultation has been sent to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service regarding potential impacts to endangered species. Letters of consultation have been sent to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History and Mississippi Tribal Historic Preservation Office, in regard to cultural resources. Copies of concurrence request letters are provided in Appendix B.

The initial phase of this project will not affect wetlands; however, Phase II will involve filling up to 0.5 acre of jurisdictional wetlands. Construction of the yard area in Phase II is authorized by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers under Nationwide Permit 39, dated May 30, 2007. A copy of this Corps authorization is provided in Appendix B.

Information regarding soil classification and characteristics was obtained from the following source:

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service. 1981. Soils Survey of Hancock County, Mississippi. 103pp.

This Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, the President's Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] Parts 1500-1508) to implement NEPA, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) regulations (44 CFR § 10.9) to implement NEPA, and the Department of Homeland Security's Management Directive 5100.1. FEMA guidelines for compliance with NEPA are found in the following:

Federal Emergency Management Agency. May 14, 1996. The National Environmental Policy Act, FEMA Desk Reference.