

## Opportunities to Comment

Your comments are essential to this environmental assessment and the development and assessment of interim and permanent alternatives. We seek your comments on the scope of issues to be addressed and identifying any issues related to the proposed action.

In order for your comments to be considered as part of this phase of the project, all comments must be received by **June 20, 2008**. There will be additional opportunities for public comment when the draft Environmental Assessment is complete.

### By Mail

In addition to submitting a comment this evening, please send additional written scoping comments to:

Glenn DeMarr  
Project Manager  
Office of Lands, Resources and Planning  
National Capital Region  
National Park Service  
1100 Ohio Drive, SW  
Washington, DC 20242

### Website

You may submit electronic comments on the National Park Service's Planning, Environment and Public Comment Site:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/>

Search for National Mall and Memorial Parks,  
Environmental Assessment for Design  
Alternatives for the Potomac Park Levee System  
or go to:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?parkId=427&projectId=22260>

### Email

[comments@potomaclevee.com](mailto:comments@potomaclevee.com)

Additional opportunities to provide comment on this project will occur during the public release of the EA later this summer.

## Project Contact Information

Glenn DeMarr  
National Capital Region  
Office of Lands, Resources & Planning  
(202) 619-7027  
[comments@potomaclevee.com](mailto:comments@potomaclevee.com)

## Interagency Coordination

As part of the Environmental Assessment and Section 106 Process, the following agencies are working together on the Potomac Park Levee Improvement Project:

### DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

- Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development
- Office of Planning
- State Historic Preservation Office
- District Department of the Environment
- DC Water and Sewer Authority
- Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

### FOR THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT:

- United States Army Corps of Engineers
- National Park Service
- National Capital Planning Commission
- General Services Administration
- Commission of Fine Arts

## NEPA & Section 106 Process

### ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

This EA is being prepared in accordance with section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as implemented by the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR Parts 1500-1509), and in accordance with the National Park Service (NPS) NEPA guidelines.

The NPS utilizes Director's Order 12, Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision-making, and Handbook 12 to establish these guidelines. Handbook 12 defines the steps within the NEPA process and outlines the necessary requirements and contents for environmental document preparation.

### SECTION 106

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) requires Federal agencies to take into account the effects of their undertakings on historic properties. If it is determined that the proposed action could affect historic properties, Section 106 is triggered.

The Section 106 task and the NEPA assessment need to be closely coordinated. The results of the EA analysis will determine the type of decision document required.

In the Spring of 2008, pursuant to Section 106 regulations implemented by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) that encourage early coordination with groups or individuals who have a demonstrated interest in historic properties that may be affected by a proposed project, the NPS invited a number of constituents to participate in the Section 106 process as consulting parties.

## Known Challenges

### A. Multiple Jurisdiction

The responsibilities and jurisdiction for addressing flooding in the District are complex, especially related to the National Mall and the downtown area. The federal government is the largest developer, tenant and property owner in downtown DC. The National Park Service (NPS) maintains the Potomac Park Levee and is the land manager of the National Mall. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has design, construction, and annual inspection responsibility for federally authorized levee projects such as the Potomac Park Levee.

### B. Local Impacts to Community

Without a reliable flood protection solution in place, every building/property owner located within the mapped area is at risk for flooding. There are approximately 110 single-family homes, 116 multi-family buildings and 2.3 million square feet of potentially unusable ground floor commercial space at risk for flooding from a 100-year event. The financial impact to private property owners located in the flood risk area will be realized through additional insurance requirements and upgraded building standards.

### C. Federal Interest Impacts

FEMA's proposed floodplain maps include a large portion of the monumental core. The impacts to federal interests are substantial. The two primary requirements of federal facilities constructed within a floodplain are: a) compliance with Executive Order 11988 to avoid floodplain impacts, and b) adherence to more stringent building codes. Both of these requirements would result in substantial costs to upgrade existing facilities by relocating power and air handling systems above the base flood elevation. There are a number of building modernization projects currently in development that would be affected by the new floodplain maps. The federal areas at risk for flooding include essential executive and legislative functions critical to national security. Unless a reliable levee system is in-place, these government operations are at risk.

The NPS will (in the interim of more reliable interim or permanent solutions) erect the designed closure structure that has been part of the levee system design for 70 years.

### D. Engineering Alternatives

Potential engineering solutions to improve the levee closure that have been used in other municipalities include "post and panel structures", raising the height of the roadway, and a combination of sandbags/jersey barriers. The District, NPS, and USACE seek to develop and analyze a range of alternatives that would meet FEMA requirement to protect against the 100-year flood as an interim solution as well as develop and analyze solutions that would meet the higher level of protection that USACE requires for a permanent levee solution.



## Potomac Park Levee Project

### Project Description

Washington, DC is protected from river flooding by the Potomac Park levee which extends from 23rd Street, NW, parallel to the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool and ends on the Washington Monument Grounds east of 17th Street. During a flood, the levee system provides protection only if a combination of sandbags and soil (i.e. an earthen dike) are used to temporarily close 17th Street and block the flow of water into downtown DC.

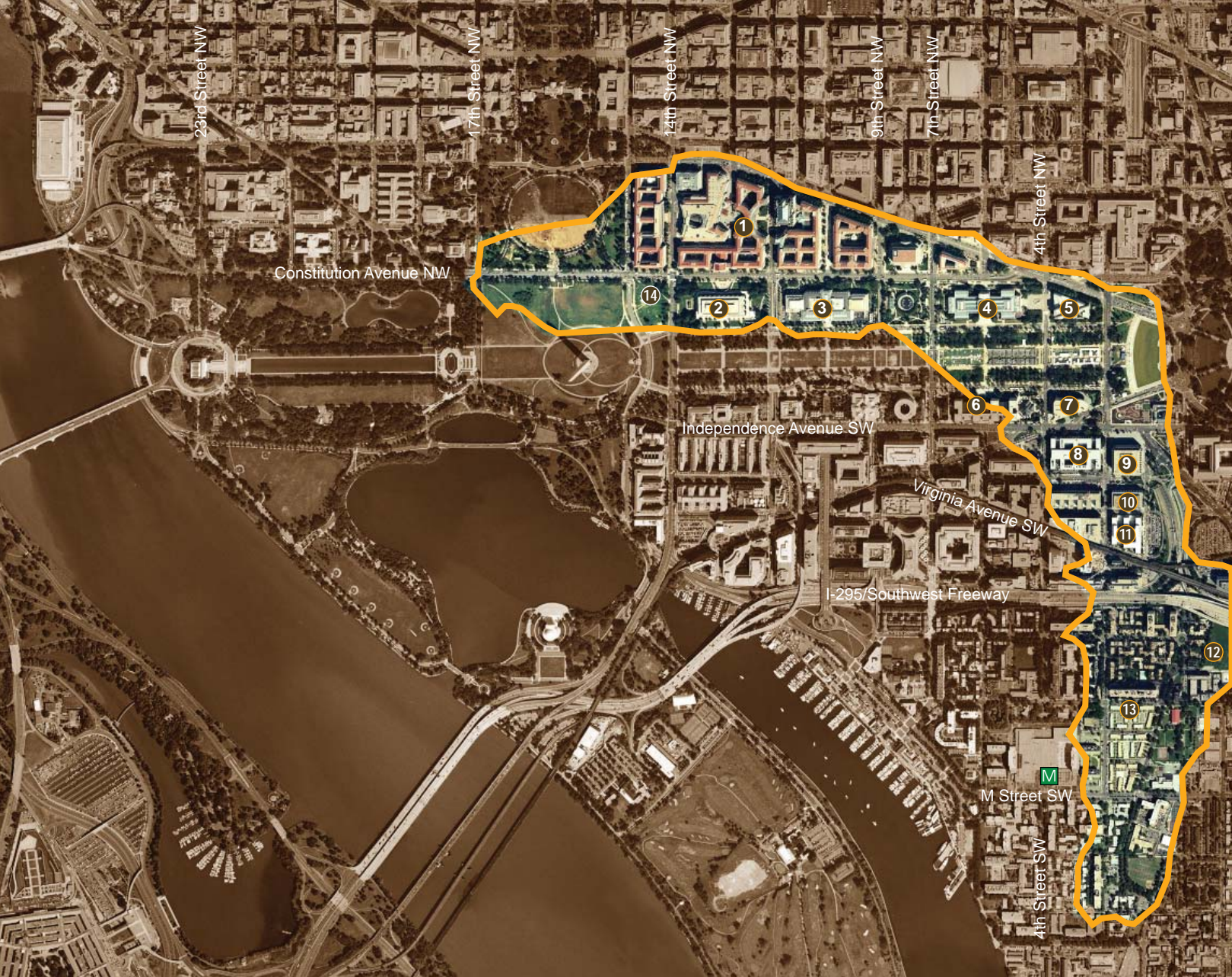
### Background

Recent changes in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) inspection guidelines deemed the 17th Street levee closure unreliable, thus decertifying the levee. Consequently, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) proposed new flood insurance maps for the District of Columbia that delineate a large area of downtown DC as the 100-year floodplain. A 100-year flood has a 1% probability of occurring in any given year. Areas that were preliminarily identified as being located within flood-prone areas include:

- The Federal Triangle Area of downtown
- Portions of the National Mall area and numerous museums that line the Mall between 4th and 7th Streets
- Other public and private facilities that extend into Southwest, DC along 3rd Street, SW
- Many private residences in the community of Capital Park and others southward along 3rd Street to the intersection of P and Canal Streets, SW







## The Proposed Action

The purpose of this action is to improve the reliability of river flood protection provided by the Potomac Park levee system to a portion of the monumental core and downtown Washington D.C. in a manner that respects the resources and values of the National Mall. Without reliable flood protection measures, many major facilities in downtown Washington D.C., including portions of the monumental core, portions of Pennsylvania and Constitution Avenues, Federal Triangle, and areas south of the U.S. Capitol to Fort McNair, are at risk of flooding from a major (100-year plus) flood event.

The current Potomac Park levee structure, completed in 1938, includes a permanent earthen barrier, sandbags along 23rd Street, and construction of a temporary earthen levee across 17th Street. NPS constructs the 17th Street closure once notified of an impending flood.

This temporary levee system has not been favored by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) due to the large scope of this type of emergency closure project, coupled by unknown weather conditions and logistic requirements. Based on new policies since Hurricane Katrina (33 CFR 208.10), this system is unacceptable and no longer meets USACE design standards.

Moreover, in 1936 Congress authorized USACE to construct a higher level of flood protection to ensure that Washington, DC was protected from a 185-year flood event. As a result, USACE will only certify a permanent levee that meets this higher level of protection. At this time, USACE has not received funds to construct a permanent levee that would meet the congressionally-authorized protection level. However, the Environmental Assessment (EA) will analyze proposed designs that meet the authorized 185-year flood event level.

## Objectives

The following objectives were identified by the planning team for this project:

- Provide immediate protection to downtown Washington D.C and the monumental core in the event of a 100-year storm, thereby meeting the National Flood Insurance Program requirements (interim level of protection).
- Ensure that the selected design can be easily modified or enhanced to meet the 185-year flood protection requirements (authorized or permanent level of protection)
- Minimize adverse impacts to the cultural landscapes, historic structures, and other cultural resources of the National Mall and the project area.
- Minimize adverse impacts to the viewsheds of the National Mall and the monumental core, and the visual quality of the project area.
- Minimize disruption to visitor use and experience in the National Mall and monumental core.
- Minimize adverse impacts to park management and operations and provide the NPS with the most effective and reliable closure system in advance of a flood event.
- Avoid additional costs of insurance or construction to property owners in the project area.
- Minimize disruption to traffic in the downtown Washington D.C. project area during construction

## Area of Impact

The boundary above delineates the area of the District that is at risk for flooding, according to the USACE, if the Potomac Park levee fails. The National Park Service (NPS), at present and by agreement, is the federal agency responsible for the closure of the levee at 17th street.

## Current Status

The District of Columbia requested FEMA delay issuing new floodplain maps in March 2008 in order to perform the necessary engineering analysis that may either substantially reduce the flood risk area, or more importantly, provide an interim levee solution to protect the District from a 100-year storm. FEMA agreed to delay the final issuance of the maps until November 2009 provided that the District design and construct an interim levee solution by that time. The agreement requires the District and the affected federal agencies to meet several interim deadlines and demonstrate adequate progress in designing and constructing a viable flood protection solution. If the conditions of the agreement cannot be met, FEMA will issue new floodplain maps for the District.

## List of Buildings

1. Federal Triangle (Department of Justice, Department of Commerce, National Aquarium, White House Visitor Center, Old Post Office Tower, Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, National Archives, Wilson Building, D.C. Visitor Center, Internal Revenue Service, and the Federal Trade Commission)
2. National Museum of American History
3. National Museum of Natural History
4. National Gallery of Art West Building
5. National Gallery of Art East Building
6. National Air & Space Museum
7. National Museum of the American Indian
8. Voice of America Studio
9. Department of Health & Human Services
10. Food & Drug Administration
11. Ford House Office Building
12. Randall Recreational Center
13. Single and multi-family residential buildings in Southwest neighborhood
14. National Museum of African American History & Culture (Future)

