

DuPage River, Illinois Flood Risk Management Feasibility Study

National Environmental Policy Act Scoping Summary

March 2016



Chicago District
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers



Stormwater Management Planning Committee
DuPage County, Illinois



Executive Office
Will County, Illinois

DuPage River, Illinois
Flood Risk Management Feasibility Study

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Study Area.....	1
1.2 Study Purpose.....	1
2. NEPA Scoping.....	3
2.1 NEPA procedures and requirements.....	3
2.2 Scoping notification and outreach process.....	3
3. Summary of Comments	4
3.1 Distribution of Comments.....	4
3.2 Areas of Concern.....	4
3.3 Recommendations for further investigation.....	6
4. Next steps.....	6

1. Introduction

This report provides a summary of the comments received during the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Public Scoping period for the DuPage River, Illinois Feasibility Study. The study is being conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Chicago District (Corps) in partnership with the DuPage County Stormwater Management Planning Committee and the Will County Executive Office. The study is investigating structural and non-structural alternatives to address overbank flooding along the DuPage River and its major tributaries. The NEPA Scoping period began on October 30 and ended on December 4, 2015.

1.1 Study Area

The DuPage River and its tributaries, shown in Figure 1, drain approximately 353 square miles, primarily in DuPage and Will Counties in Illinois. The East and West Branches of the DuPage River lie primarily in DuPage County and flow south towards Will County where they meet the DuPage River mainstem. The mainstem flows south through Will County to its confluence with the Des Plaines River in Channahon, Illinois.

1.2 Study Purpose

The DuPage River, Illinois Feasibility Study will investigate overbank and backwater flooding along the DuPage River and its major tributaries, prioritizing high risk areas and developing a range of possible structural and non-structural alternatives to address flood risks. The study area has experienced rapid development over the past several decades, and currently includes 40 communities and approximately 900,000 residents. Major storm events resulting in overbank flooding in the basin occurred in 1996, 2008, 2010, and most recently in April 2013. The April 2013 flood impacted at least 20 communities and caused significant damage to residential and non-residential structures, critical infrastructure. Overbank flooding has also caused the closure of a major interstate highway (I-55) in multiple locations, as well as the closure of multiple U.S., State, and County highways.

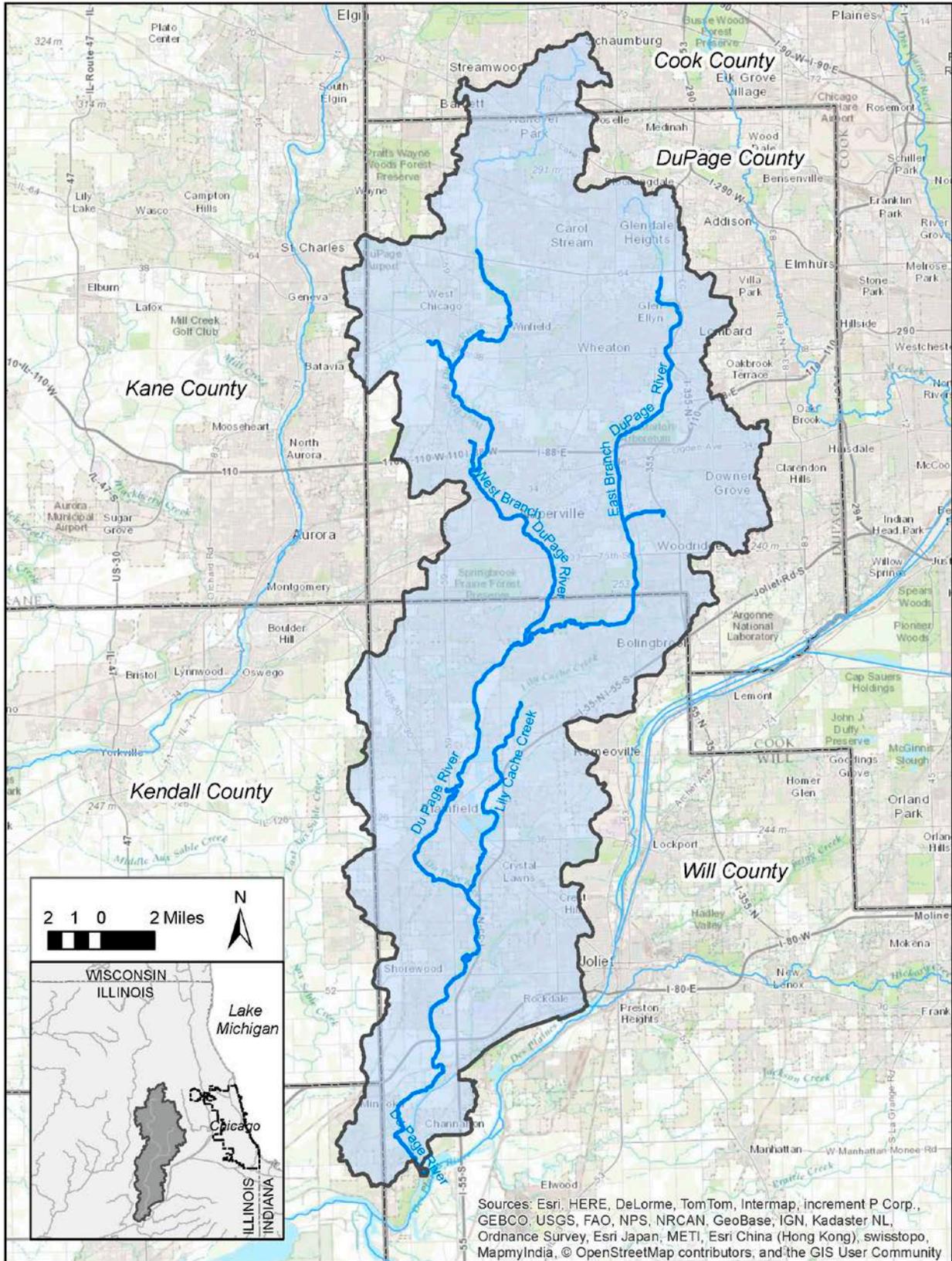


Figure 1: Study Area

2. NEPA Scoping

2.1 NEPA procedures and requirements

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires Federal agencies to consider environmental effects of a proposed project including, among others, impacts on social, cultural, and economic resources, as well as natural resources. The Corps considers these effect during the Feasibility Study process to inform the selection of an alternative plan.

Scoping, conducted before any decisions or recommendations have been identified, provides a way to for Federal, state, and local agencies as well as members of the public to identify issues and concerns that should be considered during the study and in the assessment of environmental impacts. Plan formulation and analysis is then conducted considering the issues and concerns raised during the scoping period.

Once a preferred plan is identified, the environmental effects of the plan are reviewed to determine whether there would be any significant impacts. If no significant impacts are expected an Environmental Assessment (EA) is prepared, documenting the findings. If significant impacts are identified, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is prepared. Stakeholders and the public are provided an opportunity to review and comment on the draft recommendation and the agency's assessment of its effects. The draft report is released for a minimum 30-day review period.

2.2 DuPage River study Scoping notification and outreach process

On October 30, 2015 scoping letters were mailed to: 19 representatives of Federal, state, and county agencies; mayors and managers of 28 watershed municipalities; and 26 local libraries. The letters notified stakeholders of the study and solicited comments and concerns about flooding in the watershed as well as the potential for impacts to natural, cultural, and social resources. The Corps issued a press release and posted to the District's Facebook page on November 3 announcing the scoping period and providing the dates, times and locations of three public meetings to be held in the watershed. DuPage and Will Counties further promoted the study scoping and the opportunity to learn more about the study and provide comments during the public meetings through separate press releases and other outreach activities.

Interested parties were provided with multiple ways to provide comments: through mail, email, orally at a public meeting, or provided directly to Corps staff at a public meeting. The public meetings were held at various locations across the watershed: November 16 at the Bolingbrook Golf Club, November 17 at the DuPage County JTK Administration Building in Wheaton, and November 18 at the Shorewood Village Hall.

The scoping period lasted through December 4, although comments received after this deadline are also included in this summary.

3. Summary of Comments

3.1 Distribution of Comments

Comments were provided by resource agencies, affected municipalities, and members of the public. A summary of who commented is provided in the table below. The summary of members of the public includes individuals who provided oral and written comments.

Table 1: Summary of Commenters

<i>Resource Agencies</i>	
Illinois Historic Preservation Association	
Illinois Department of Natural Resources – Impact Assessment Section	
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	
<i>Affected Municipalities</i>	
City of Warrenville	
City of Woodridge	
<i>Members of the Public</i>	
<i>Zip Code</i>	<i>Number of Comments</i>
60137 (Glen Ellyn)	32*
60148 (Lombard)	1
60190 (Winfield)	4*
60404 (Shorewood)	4
60410 (Channahon)	9
60431 (Joliet)	1
60440 (Bolingbrook)	1
60447 (Minooka)	5
60490 (Bolingbrook)	1
60532 (Lisle)	1
60544 (Plainfield)	14*
60555 (Warrenville)	3*
60585 (Plainfield)	1
60586 (Plainfield)	1
Not identified	2

*Includes multiple comments by an individual commenter.

3.2 Areas of Concern

Resource Agencies

Resource agencies noted potential impacts to resources under their jurisdiction. The Illinois Historic Preservation Association will continue to coordinate with the Chicago District on the potential impact of any proposed projects on prehistoric and historic resources. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources provided initial information about significant natural resources in the watershed, and will continue to coordinate with the Chicago District on the potential impact of any proposed projects on natural resources in the watershed.

Affected Municipalities and Members of the Public

The majority of the comments provided by members of the public identified locations where flooding has occurred and provided information about the frequency, duration, and depth of flooding. Commenters reported that flooding not only causes damage to properties, but also puts the lives of residents at risk when roadways are flooded, making evacuation and access by emergency responders difficult. Flooding further impacts the ability of homeowners to resell their properties and causes significant emotional distress.

Several homeowners have experienced elevated groundwater levels associated with rising river levels. Subsurface flows through porous soils affects structures with basements in the vicinity of the river during flood events. Residents in multiple areas reported this type of flooding, including the Valley View neighborhood in unincorporated DuPage County, parts of Channahon and adjacent unincorporated areas in Will County, and parts of Minooka in Will County. Flooding associated with subsurface flows becomes more severe when there is a power outage and sump pumps stop working.

Several commenters identified erosion of river banks and accumulation of debris in the floodplain and at bridges as a concern. Particularly in Will County, residents have documented bank erosion at their properties and large amounts of debris are carried to their properties during flood events. Several bridges that restrict flows or where debris accumulates were also identified.

Commenters also expressed concern about the impacts of development on flooding in the watershed. Specific concerns included increases in the amount of impervious surfaces, fill in the floodway and the floodplain, and increases in river base flows due to discharges from wastewater treatment plants. Many commenters noted that they had observed an increased frequency of significant flooding.

Commenters identified the three major dams in the watershed as sources of flooding: Fawell Dam on the West Branch as well as Hammel Woods Dam and Channahon Dam on the mainstem. Residents reported increased groundwater level and river stages resulting from the increase in normal pool elevation at Fawell and Channahon Dams as well as increased flood stages at upstream properties for all dams. However, residents at downstream properties also expressed concerns about the potential impacts of dam modifications to their properties.

Residents also expressed concerns about existing and proposed projects in the watershed including ecosystem restoration at Morton Arboretum, a berm constructed at the Lakelands subdivision, a boat launch installed along the DuPage River in Plainfield, plans to modify discharge flows from Lake Ellyn in Glen Ellyn, and proposed improvements to highways such as Interstate 355 and U.S. Route 53.

3.3 Recommendations for further investigation

A number of commenters provided suggestions for projects that could alleviate flooding in the watershed including potential locations for storage, diversions, levees, and channel modifications. General recommendations include:

- Improve mapping and modeling of flood stages
- Dredge the river to remove accumulated sediment
- Clear debris or address constrictions at several bridges
- Ensure appropriate retention times at existing detention ponds
- Regulate allowed discharges from new development in the watershed
- Modify existing dams to minimize flood impacts

Several residents were concerned about the potential impacts of levees and floodwalls on structures outside of the protected area and noted that projects should not be built if they would induce flooding at other locations.

Several commenters also requested that this study be coordinated with other agencies planning flood risk management and/or development projects in the watershed including the Illinois Department of Transportation, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and local agencies.

3.4 Next steps

The information provided during the scoping period will be used to inform the analyses completed for the Feasibility Study.

- Identified damage areas, including areas where subsurface flows impact properties, will be incorporated into documentation of flood risks in the watershed used to identify study problems and areas of focus for further investigations.
- Proposed projects and recommendations for further investigation will be considered as alternative plans are developed.
- Impacts to identified resources will also be considered as plans are developed. The plans will seek to avoid impacts to these resources where possible. If they cannot be avoided, then the plans will minimize or mitigate any impacts.

The draft Feasibility Report documenting the preferred plan and the analysis of its effects is scheduled to be released for public review in January 2017. Comments received during this review period will be addressed before the plan is finalized. The final steps in the study process includes refinement of the designs for the proposed plan and Washington level review of the Feasibility Report. These final steps are schedule to be completed in July 2018.