

**Illinois Environmental Protection Agency  
Bureau of Water, Permit Section  
(IEPA)**

1021 North Grand Avenue East, Post Office Box 19276, Springfield, Illinois 62794-9276, 217/782-3362

The IEPA has issued a Public Notice of a request for a Clean Water Act Section 401 water quality certification that would allow the issuance of a federal permit for the discharge of pollutants to waters of the State.

**Public Notice Beginning Date:**

Monday, May 12, 2025

**Public Notice Ending Date:**

Monday, June 2, 2025

**Agency Log No.: C-0032-25**

**Federal Permit Information:** This civil works project is under the jurisdiction of Rock Island District, Regulatory Branch U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

**Name and Address of Discharger:** US Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District - Clock Tower Building, P.O. Box 2004, Rock Island, IL 61204-2004

**Discharge Location:** In Statewide/Regional in Carroll County. Additional project location information includes the following: Upper Mississippi River. River Mile 528.0-528.6 near Thomson, Illinois, Thomson, IL 61285

**Name of Receiving Water:** Mississippi River

**Project Name/Description:** Elk River Thalweg - Dredged Material Placement Site - proposed use of the Elk River Thalweg for future placement of dredged material

**Construction Schedule:** Beginning Apr 2025 and ending Sep 2025

The Public Notice period will begin and end on the dates indicated in the heading of this Public Notice. Interested persons are invited to submit written comments on the project to the IEPA at the above address. Commenters must provide their name and address along with comments on the certification request. The IEPA Log number must appear on each comment page. Commenters may include a request for public hearing. Only hearing requests and comments that pertain to Clean Water Act Section 401 authority will be considered. This authority provides consideration of whether the permit or license would be consistent with Sections 301, 302, 303, 306, or 307 of the CWA, as well as "any other appropriate requirement of State [or tribal] law". Requests for additional comment period must provide a demonstration of need. The final day of comment acceptance will be on the Public Notice Ending date shown above, unless the IEPA grants an extended notice period. The attached Fact Sheet provides a detailed description of the project and the findings of the IEPA's antidegradation assessment.

If written comments or requests indicate a significant degree of public interest in the certification application, the IEPA may, at its discretion, hold a public hearing. Public notice will be given 30 days before any public hearing. If a Section 401 water quality certification is issued, response to relevant comments will be provided at the time of the certification. For further information, please see the contact information below.

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Post Document. No. C-0032-25-05122025-PublicNoticeAndFactSheet.pdf

## 401 Water Quality Certification Fact Sheet for Elk River Thalweg DMP Site

IEPA Log No. C-0032-25

Contact: Angie Sutton      217-782-9864

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The United States Corps of Engineers (applicant) has applied for 401 water quality certification for placement of dredged materials in the Elk River Thalweg in Pool 13 of the Mississippi River from River Mile (RM) 528.0 to 528.6. The Elk River Thalweg Site was one of several sites selected in the DMMP to provide necessary placement capacity. While other placement sites have been used, the Elk River Site has not been used for placement to date. Placement at the Elk River Thalweg would be in addition to other existing placement options which continue to meet applicable federal compliance requirements. The material being dredged, and proposed for placement in the Elk River Thalweg, is currently being placed at other existing placement locations. The affected reach of the river is located in Township 23 North, Range 3 East, Section 15, near Thomson, Carroll County, Illinois.

This project will enable continued recreational and commercial use of the Mississippi River by supporting the Mississippi River 9-foot Navigation Channel Project. The project will provide for the placement of material, primarily fine to medium grain sand or sand/gravel mixture, resulting from the maintenance dredging operations. Materials would be dredged and placed by either mechanical or hydraulic cutter-suction dredging plants. Currently, dredged material is being placed at other existing placement locations which had been previously approved (permit # Illinois EPA C-0469-14). The Elk River Thalweg surface area is approximately 9 acres and has an estimated 115,000 cubic yard (CY) renewable storage capacity. A total of 60 potential placement sites were considered in the 2004 Dredged Material Management Plan with Environmental Assessment. Nine of the 60 sites were ultimately selected. Of the 9 sites selected, 3 have been implemented. Elk River Thalweg would be the 4th placement site.

Information used in this review was obtained from the applicant in a document entitled, Section 404(b)(1) Evaluation, Maintenance Dredging of the 9-Foot Channel Navigation Project, Upper Mississippi River, River Miles 300.0 – 614.0, Joint Application Form for Illinois dated June 2014. The applicant also provided additional information dated January 17, 2025, March 14, 2025,

Because the work proposed will be done in Clinton County, Iowa, The Iowa Department of Natural Resources previously issued certification No. 2014-1163 to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

### **Identification and Characterization of the Affected Water Body.**

The Mississippi River has 13,985 cfs of flow during critical 7Q10 low-flow conditions. The Mississippi River is classified as General Use Water. The Mississippi River is not listed as a biologically significant stream in the 2008 Illinois Department of Natural Resources Publication *Integrating Multiple Taxa in a Biological Stream Rating System*, nor is it given an integrity rating in that document. The Mississippi River, Waterbody Segment IL\_M-12, is listed on the 2024 Illinois Integrated Water Quality Report and Section 303(d) List as impaired for fish consumption use with potential causes given as aldrin, dieldrin, endrin, heptachlor, mercury, mirex, polychlorinated biphenyls, and toxaphene, and primary contact use with a potential cause given as fecal coliform. Aquatic life use is fully supported. This segment of the Mississippi River is subject to enhanced dissolved oxygen standards.

### **Identification of Proposed Pollutant Load Increases or Potential Impacts on Uses.**

Pollutant load increases that would occur from this project include some increases in suspended solids during the dredging and placement of the spoil material. The benthic habitat will be disturbed but should revert to its previous condition of aquatic life support soon after dredging and placement.

The amount expected to be placed in the waterway is variable based on dredging requirements. This is one of several sites selected as part of the preferred alternative to accommodate placement of dredged materials from the 9-foot Navigation Channel Project. The site has an estimated 115,000 CY capacity, which is renewable. Placement at this location would be considered viable if capacity is available. The dredged material is primarily fine to medium-grained sand, and grain size characterization (USACE, 1/17/25) confirms that the material does not require additional chemical testing under 35 IAC 302.205.

#### **Fate and Effect of Parameters Proposed for Increased Loading.**

The increase in suspended solids will be local and temporary. No wetland impacts are associated with the Elk River Thalweg Site, and impacts at other sites have been addressed through mitigation. Dredging quantities will be kept to the minimum amount necessary to maintain the 9-foot navigation channel. Bankline, inland, levee and thalweg placements, as well as island creation, are designed and intended to minimize ecological impacts.

Containment berms to control water from the hydraulic dredge operations shall be constructed prior to dredging as needed to ensure that dredged material is not allowed to escape the placement site. All sites would be accessed directly from the river. All dredged material placement shall be placed within the construction limits, heights, widths, and final shaping as outlined in the site development plans. All final shaping and grading of the placement sites must be completed soon after the dredging has finished ensuring proper drainage and sloping stability. In addition, all access areas must be restored to their former design and grade for all project activities.

A total of 60 potential placement sites were considered in the 2004 Dredged Material Management Plan with Environmental Assessment. Nine of the 60 sites were ultimately selected. Of the 9 sites selected, 3 have been implemented. Elk River Thalweg would be the 4th placement site. Site 5a was one of the sites previously implemented. This site was to construct a habitat island to compensate for wetland impacts that would occur at 3 of the other placement sites, if constructed. While the approximately 6-acre habitat island, called Site 5a, was constructed, none of the sites which contained wetlands were constructed or used for placement. More information regarding avoidance, minimization and compensation can be found in the Dredged Material Management Plan and Environmental Assessment.

#### **Purpose and Anticipated Benefits of the Proposed Activity.**

This project is necessary in order to maintain the 9-foot navigation channel on the Mississippi, Illinois, and Kaskaskia Rivers. This will maintain the commercial and recreational uses of the river system.

#### **Assessments of Alternatives for Less Increase in Loading or Minimal Environmental Degradation.**

The proposed activity involves maintenance dredging and dredged material placement, which is inherently water dependent. Based on the Sabula Reach DMMP, a comprehensive alternatives analysis was conducted that evaluated over 30 potential placement sites using criteria including technical feasibility, environmental constraints, and proximity to dredge cuts. The Sabula Reach DMMP was included as part of the application materials.

Most sites were eliminated due to access limitations, habitat concerns, or infeasibility of channel maintenance. The Elk River Thalweg site (Site 9) is designated as a contingency site, to be used only following full utilization of the primary island creation site (Site 5).

#### **Summary Comments of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Regional Planning Commissions, Zoning Boards or Other Entities**

An EcoCAT consultation (Project # 2512277) was initiated for this project on April 23, 2025. The Illinois Natural Heritage Database shows the following protected resources may be in the vicinity of the project location:

- Butterfly mussel (*Ellipsaria lineolata*)
- Higgins Eye mussel (*Lampsilis higginsii*)
- Monkeyface mussel (*Quadrula metanevra*)
- Pallid Shiner (*Hybopsis amnis*)
- Weed Shiner (*Notropis texanus*)
- Western Sand Darter (*Ammocrypta clarum*)

An IDNR staff member will evaluate this information and if necessary, request additional information, or terminate consultation if adverse effects are unlikely.

A Record of National Environmental Policy Act Consideration dated May 20, 2024, was included by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – Rock Island District as part of the application package. It was determined that the proposed project is adequately covered in the EA entitled *DMMP w/EA Sabula Reach, December 2004*.

The letter states that In August 2023, the Pool 13 On Site Inspection Team visited the Sabula Reach DMMP sites to evaluate the current and future use of the eight DMMP sites. The District has determined the future use of the Elk River Thalweg for dredge material placement falls within the scope and would be compliant with the 2004 DMMP with EA. Therefore, the proposed action requires no further NEPA documentation.

“In 2004, the District determined dredge material placement at Site 9 (Elk River Thalweg), would not adversely impact any federal threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat, citing the study 'Evaluation of Unionid Mussel Colonization within Thalweg and Island Creation Areas Potentially Affected by Dredged Material Placement within Pools 12, 13, and 14 of the Upper Mississippi River'. The study found mussels are usually very sparse on rippled sand where substrate instability is indicated; furthermore, none of the Pool 13 thalweg sites sampled were considered good habitat with healthy unionid communities. There are no indications these conditions have changed.

These observations indicate no suitable habitat for listed mussel species in the project area. For these reasons, the District concludes dredge material placement in the Elk River Thalweg would have no effect on Higgins eye (*Lampsilis higginsii*) and sheepsnose (*Plethobasus cyphus*) mussels. As this is an in-water action, this action will also have no effect to any other listed species (see attached official species list).”

The official species list provided by the USFWS Section 7 consultation is as follows:

- Indiana Bat (*Myotis sodalis*) – Endangered
- Northern Long-eared Bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*) – Endangered
- Tricolored Bat (*Perimyotis subflavus*) – Proposed Endangered
- Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*) – Experimental Population, Non-Essential
- Higgins Eye (pearlymussel) (*Lampsilis higginsii*) – Endangered
- Sheepsnose Mussel (*Plethobasus cyphus*) – Endangered
- Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) – Candidate

- Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid (*Platanthera leucophaea*) - Threatened

**Agency Conclusion.**

This assessment was conducted pursuant to the Illinois Pollution Control Board regulation for Antidegradation found at 35 Ill. Adm. Code 302.105 (Antidegradation standard). We find that the proposed activity, utilizing historic dredging locations and placement sites, will result in the attainment of water quality standards. All technically and economically reasonable measures to avoid or minimize the extent of the proposed increase in pollutant loading have been incorporated into the proposed activity. This activity will benefit the community at large by maintaining commercial and recreational uses of the river system. The proposed activity is therefore compliant with the Antidegradation standard.