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## 6.0 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

To promote open communication and better decision-making, the USACE encourages public involvement in the NEPA process. All persons and organizations that have a potential interest in the proposed IMC project are invited to participate in the NEPA process. For information on public involvement to date, see Section 1.4.3.1.

### 6.1 NOTICE OF INTENT

The NOI to prepare an EIS is the first step in the NEPA EIS process. The NOI notifies the public that the agency intends to prepare an EIS for a specific proposed action. The USACE published the NOI to prepare an EIS for the proposed IMC project, in the *Federal Register* on August 14, 2000. A copy of the NOI is included in Appendix G.

### 6.2 SCOPING AND DRAFT EIS

IMC prepared the CDA as a result of over three years of public and agency coordination. In addition, this coordination served as the scoping process for this EIS.

From 1997 through 1999, an intensive series of meetings, workshops, field tours, and work sessions was convened as part of the permitting process for the Ona Mine. An AWG and the PWG was created to coordinate the permitting process. Two sub-groups of the AWG and PWG were also formed near the outset of the process in early 1998. These sub-groups were the natural systems sub-group, and the hydrology sub-group. The purpose of the two sub-groups was to focus agency personnel in their area of technical expertise and responsibility; allow members of the public and NGOs to participate in addressing selected issues of interest; and to keep the overall process moving forward in an efficient manner. Periodic joint meetings of both sub-groups and the combined AWG and PWG were conducted. Additionally, small work groups including natural systems and hydrology specialists from the participating agencies were also convened.

The initial task of each sub-group was to review and approve a series of workplans to acquire site-specific information about the existing, or baseline, vegetative communities, wildlife, threatened and endangered plant and animal species, wetlands, surface water, groundwater, floodplains, storm water, transportation, and archaeological and historical resources on the proposed site. The group also reviewed the mine and plant design basis. In early 1999, agency comments on the workplans were consolidated and the workplans were "accepted" by all responsible regulatory agencies as being sufficient to provide the information necessary for preparing complete permit applications.

Facilitators from the Florida Conflict CRC and the FDEP worked with NGOs and interested citizens to generate a list of issues and/or questions that members of the public wanted to be addressed in the CDA. These were incorporated into the CDA workplan. The result of

these interactions and discussions is the AID published by IMC in October 1998, and provided to the AWG and PWG members.

The natural systems sub-group concentrated its efforts on classifying areas of the site as areas to be mined and areas of consideration interest, and began an iterative process of modifying IMC's initial proposal. The group first identified areas of the proposed site that possessed ecological attributes sufficient to justify not disturbing these areas by mining operations. Areas that met these qualifications were termed "areas of conservation interest" by the AWG.

AWG members used the wildlife survey results and the upland and wetland vegetative descriptions and analyses to identify potential areas of conservation interest. In addition, certain AWG members participated in site tours and separate discussions concerning the ability to reclaim mined land to specific habitat types.

These efforts led to the AWG delineating areas of conservation interest in July 1999. Throughout the August 1999 through July 2001 period, additional meetings and site tours were attended by both AWG and PWG members, leading to the development of the various Alternatives studied in this EIS.

The CRC and the FDEP facilitators worked with a large group of representatives from regulatory agencies, environmental organizations, interested citizens, counties, and other NGOs to address the environmental, social, and economic issues related to the proposed Ona Mine. The outcome of this process was the identification of Alternatives and Team Permitting Agreement described in Section 1.6.1. A list of the AWG and PWG members is included in Section 6.3. Two points of note regarding the members of these groups are: 1) there has been significant involvement by key personnel from agencies that are not parties to the Agreement, including the USFWS; and 2) the level of participation by numerous citizens and NGOs was very good considering that meetings often occurred during working hours. Also noteworthy is that the USEPA Region 4 has followed the process and provided comments and input.

### **6.3 AGENCY COORDINATION**

As described in Section 6.2, an AWG was formed to provide input into the permitting process, and by default, the EIS process.

Agency coordination letters are in Appendix C.

### **6.4 PUBLIC REVIEW OF DRAFT EIS**

The draft EIS is being made available for public review and comment. A NOA of the draft EIS will be published in the *Federal Register* as well as the Tampa Tribune and the Wauchula Herald Advocate newspapers. In addition, copies of the draft EIS will be provided to local libraries. Agencies, organizations, and individuals will be invited to

review and comment on the document. A 45-day review period has been established to allow reviewers the opportunity to comment on the analysis or other aspects of the EIS process.

## **6.5 LIST OF STATEMENT RECIPIENTS (DRAFT EIS)**

The NOA for the draft EIS was posted in the Tampa Tribune, Wauchula Herald Advocate, Sarasota Herald Tribune, and the Charlotte Sun Herald.

Copies of the draft EIS were mailed to the individuals and organizations listed in Appendix G.

In addition, the draft EIS is available for review at the following libraries:

1. DeSoto County Library, 125 North Hillsborough Avenue, Arcadia, FL 34266
2. Charlotte Glades Library, 18400 Murdock Circle, Port Charlotte, FL 33948
3. Hardee County Library, 315 North 6th Avenue, Suite 114, Wauchula, FL 33873
4. Highlands County Library, 319 W. Center Avenue, Sebring, FL 33870
5. Hillsborough County Library, 619 Vonderburg Drive, Brandon, FL 33511
6. Lee County Library, 2050 Central Avenue, Fort Meyers, FL 33901
7. Manatee County Library, 1301 Barcarrota Blvd, Bradenton, FL 34205
8. Polk County Library, 75 East Broadway, Fort Meade, FL 33841
9. Sarasota County Library, 1331 First Street, Sarasota, FL 34238

The draft EIS is available on the USACE website at [www.saj.usace.army.mil/permit/hot\\_topics/hot\\_topics.htm](http://www.saj.usace.army.mil/permit/hot_topics/hot_topics.htm).

## **6.6 PUBLIC MEETINGS**

The USACE may conduct a public meeting to solicit comments concerning the adequacy of the draft EIS and the merits of the alternatives analyzed. If held, this public meeting would occur during the 45-day review period following publication of the NOA of the draft EIS. The location and time of the public meeting will be announced in the Tampa Tribune and the Wauchula Herald Advocate newspapers.

## **6.7 COMMENTS RECEIVED AND RESPONSE**

The USACE will consider all comments provided by the public and agencies on the draft EIS. The final EIS will incorporate changes suggested by comments on the draft EIS, as appropriate, and will contain responses to all comments received during the review period.

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## 6.8 CIRCULATION OF FINAL EIS

The NOA of the final EIS will also be published in the *Federal Register* and the Tampa Tribune and the Wauchula Herald Advocate newspapers. In addition, the NOA will be mailed to interested and affected parties by letter.

A copy of the final EIS will be provided to all those who comment on the draft EIS. Copies of the final EIS will be mailed to selected federal, state, and local agencies. Copies will also be placed in local public libraries for review. An NOA of the final EIS will be published in the *Federal Register*.

No sooner than 30 days following completion of the final EIS, during which time further comments may be submitted for USACE consideration, the USACE will prepare a Record of Decision (ROD), which will state the decision to approve or deny the Department of the Army permit for the IMC project. If the proposed project is approved, the ROD will include any conditions or mitigation measures associated with its approval.