

SRD has been reviewing the petition and obtaining information from various sources in order to determine the present and potential use and impacts of motorized personal watercraft in the Sanctuary. In order to facilitate the review of the petition, SRD is seeking the following information: (1) The number of motorized personal watercraft being operated in the Sanctuary; (2) possible future trends in such numbers; (3) the customary launching areas for motorized personal watercraft in or near the Sanctuary; (4) the areas of use of motorized personal watercraft activity in the Sanctuary, including areas of concentrated use; (5) the periods (e.g., time of year) of use of motorized personal watercraft in the Sanctuary, including periods of high incidence of use; (6) studies or technical articles concerning the impacts of motorized personal watercraft on marine resources and other users; (7) first person or documented accounts of impacts of motorized personal watercraft on marine resources and other users; and (8) any other information or other comments that may be pertinent to this issue.

List of Subjects in 15 CFR Part 922

Administrative practice and procedure, Coastal zone, Education, Environmental protection, Marine resources, Natural resources, Penalties, Recreation and recreation areas, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements, Research.

Federal Domestic Assistance Catalog Number 11.429. Marine Sanctuary Program.

Dated: August 14, 1997.

Nancy Foster,

Assistant Administrator for Ocean Services and Coastal Zone Management.

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Coast Guard

33 CFR Part 167

[CGD 97-044]

Port Access Routes; Approaches to the Mississippi River via Southwest Pass, South Pass, Tiger Pass Including the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet

AGENCY: Coast Guard, DOT.

ACTION: Notice of study.

SUMMARY: The Coast Guard is conducting a port access route study to evaluate the need for vessel routing or

other traffic management measures in the approaches to the Mississippi River. Concerns for the safety of navigation in these areas have been expressed by the Associated Branch Pilots and the Coast Guard Marine Safety Office in New Orleans, LA. This port access route study will determine what, if any, vessel routing or other traffic management measures are needed in the approaches to the Mississippi River and the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet. As a result of the study, vessel routing measures or other vessel operating requirements may be proposed in the **Federal Register**.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before November 19, 1997.

ADDRESSES: Comments should be mailed to Commander (mov-1), Eighth Coast Guard District, Hale Boggs Federal Building, 501 Magazine Street, New Orleans, LA 70130-3396. The comments and other materials related to this notice will be available for inspection and copying at 501 Magazine Street, New Orleans, LA, room 1341. Normal office hours are 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays. Comments may also be hand delivered to this address.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Captain M.M. Ledet (504) 589-4686 or M.Ledet/D8m@mailgatehq.comdt.uscg.mil (Internet), or Margie Hegy (202) 267-0415 or MHegy@comdt.uscg.mil (Internet).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Request for Comments

The Coast Guard is interested in receiving information and opinions from persons who have an interest in safe routing of ships in the study area. Vessel owners and operators are specifically invited to comment on any safety concerns they may have when operating in the study area. Negative impacts that may result from the establishment of a routing measure, such as a traffic separation scheme (TSS), or a regulated navigation area (RNA) with vessel operating requirements should be identified and supported with documentation of any costs or benefits.

Commenters should include their names and addresses, identify this notice (CGD 97-044), and give reasons for each comment. Receipt of comments will be acknowledged if a stamped, self-addressed post card or envelope is enclosed. In addition to the specific questions asked herein, comments from the maritime community, offshore development concerns, environmental groups and any other interested parties

are invited. All comments received during the comment period will be considered in the study and in development of any regulatory proposals.

The Coast Guard intends to hold at least one public meeting to listen to the users, both commercial and recreational, of the waters in the study area. We are particularly interested in the source of delays that slow down commercial vessels and the source of upsets that interfere with the recreational boaters enjoyment of the waterway. Details of the meeting will be announced in a separate notice as well as locally.

The Eighth Coast Guard District will conduct the study and develop recommendations. Captain M.M. Ledet, Vessel Traffic Management Section, Marine Safety Branch, Eighth Coast Guard District (504) 589-4686 is the project officer responsible for the study.

Background and Purpose

The 1978 amendments to the Ports and Waterways Safety Act (PWSA), 33 U.S.C. 1223(c), require that a port access route study be conducted prior to establishing or adjusting fairways or TSS's. The Coast Guard is undertaking a port access route study to determine if a vessel routing system is needed in the study area.

An internationally recognized vessel routing system is one or more routes or routing measures aimed at reducing the risk of casualties. A system may include TSS's, two-way routes, recommended tracks, areas to be avoided, inshore traffic zones, roundabouts, precautionary areas, and deep-water routes.

A TSS is a routing measure which minimizes the risk of collision by separating vessels into opposing streams of traffic through the establishment of traffic lanes.

A two-way route is a route within defined limits inside which two-way traffic is established, aimed at providing safe passage of ships through waters where navigation is difficult or dangerous.

A recommended track is a route which has been specially examined to ensure so far as possible that it is free of dangers and along which ships are advised to navigate.

An area to be avoided is a routing measure comprising an area within defined limits in which either navigation is particularly hazardous or it is exceptionally important to avoid casualties and which should be avoided by all ships, or certain classes of ships.

An inshore traffic zone comprises a designated area between the landward boundary of a TSS and the adjacent

coast and is used in accordance with Rule 10(d) of the 72 COLREGS.

A roundabout is a routing measure comprising a separation point or circular separation zone and a circular traffic lane within defined limits. Traffic within the roundabout is separated by moving in a counterclockwise direction around the separation point or zone.

A precautionary area is a defined area where ships must navigate with particular caution and within which the direction of traffic flow may be recommended.

A deep-water route is a route within defined limits which has been accurately surveyed for clearance of sea bottom and submerged obstacles as indicated on nautical charts.

The approaches to the Mississippi River and the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet were last studied in 1984. The study concluded that there was a need for the establishment of the existing shipping safety fairways.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' *Waterborne Commerce of The United States* reports that, from 1984 to 1993, volume of traffic increased from 397.1 million tons to 520.3 million tons. Channel depths were increased to 45 feet in 1994.

The Associated Branch Pilots Association and the Coast Guard's Marine Safety Office in New Orleans have expressed concern about the safety of navigation due to the frequency of collisions that have the potential to close one of the busiest ports in the United States. In addition to safety concerns, several collisions in the past few years have demonstrated the potential for far reaching economic impact. The most recent collision involving the M/V FORMOSA SIX and the M/V FLORA partially closed the waterway with an estimated cost of over one million dollars per day.

Study Area

The study area is bounded by a line connecting the following geographic positions:

| Latitude | Longitude |
|-------------------|-------------|
| 29°02'20" N | 89°40'15" W |
| 29°33'00" N | 89°02'39" W |
| 29°32'45" N | 88°42'40" W |
| 29°03'30" N | 88°45'12" W |
| 28°36'30" N | 89°18'09" W |
| 28°26'15" N | 89°41'15" W |

The study area encompasses the approaches to the Mississippi River, the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet as well as the area offshore of southeast Louisiana used by commercial vessels transiting to and between these ports.

Issues

The Coast Guard is trying to determine the scope of any safety problems associated with vessel transit in the study area. It is expected that information will be gathered during the study that will identify the problems and appropriate solutions.

In addition to information that you wish to provide, the Coast Guard is particularly interested in your responses to the following questions:

1. What is the nature of your work that causes you to navigate in the study area?
2. How many trips do you make in the study area in a 24-hour period?
3. What route do you take? Please specify point of origin and destination?
4. Considering all the passes leading to the Gulf of Mexico, which would be the most direct to your destination?
5. Are there passes that you do not use? Why not?
6. If the U.S. Corps of Engineers maintained each pass to a predetermined depth, would you use all the passes?
7. What should be the maintained depth of each pass?
8. Have you had an accident or near miss when transiting the mouth of the Mississippi River? If so, where? Please describe the incident.
9. Would a traffic separation scheme to separate opposing streams of traffic help in preventing accidents or near misses?
10. Would improved aids to navigation help in preventing accidents or near misses? What improvements would you suggest?
11. Would mandatory vessel transit restrictions or operating requirements in the passes and near shore waters help?
12. Do you have other suggestions to improve navigational safety in the study area?

The study may recommend the following:

1. No vessel routing measures are needed.
2. Establish one or more of the following vessel routing measures:
 - (a) TSS in the approach to Southwest Pass of the Mississippi River;
 - (b) TSS in the approach to the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet;
 - (c) Precautionary area(s) near either or both approaches; or,
 - (d) Inshore traffic zone(s) near either or both approaches; and,
3. Establish a regulated navigation area with specific vessel operating requirements to ensure safe navigation.

Procedural Requirements

In order to provide safe access routes for movement of vessel traffic

proceeding to and from U.S. ports, the PWSA directs that the Secretary designate necessary fairways and TSS's in which the paramount right of navigation over all other uses shall be recognized. Before a designation can be made, the Coast Guard is required to undertake a study of potential traffic density and the need for safe access routes.

During the study, the Coast Guard is directed to consult with federal and state agencies and to consider the views of representatives of the maritime community, port and harbor authorities or associations, environmental groups, and other parties who may be affected by the proposed action.

In accordance with 33 U.S.C. 1223(c), the Coast Guard will, to the extent practicable, reconcile the need for safe access routes with the needs of all other reasonable uses of the area involved. The Coast Guard will also consider previous studies and experience in the areas of vessel traffic management, navigation, shiphandling, the effects of weather, and prior analysis of the traffic density in certain regions.

Data needed to gain a clear understanding of the waterway and its uses will be gathered by a contractor. The Coast Guard will focus on interaction with waterway users and stakeholders to scope out safety concerns and determine an appropriate solution.

The results of this study will be published in the **Federal Register**. If the Coast Guard determines that new routing or other regulatory measures are needed, a notice of proposed rulemaking will be published. It is anticipated that the study will be concluded by 30 January 1998.

Dated: August 7, 1997.

R.C. North,

Rear Admiral, U.S. Coast Guard, Assistant Commandant for Marine Safety and Environmental Protection.

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ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

40 CFR Part 52

[PA4051b; FRL-5865-7]

Approval and Promulgation of Air Quality Implementation Plans; Pennsylvania; Approval of VOC and NO_x RACT Determinations for Individual Sources

AGENCY: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).