

Mississippi Coastal Improvement Program (MsCIP) Public and Agency Involvement

Public participation in the planning and NEPA process promotes open communication between the public and the Corps and, consequently, better analysis and decision making. Public and Agency Involvement has been a critical, early, and continuing part of the MSCIP project. Public and agency involvement accomplished to date has been a multi-step, and multi-component process. Persons and organizations having a potential interest in the proposed action, including minority, low-income, disadvantaged, and Native American groups, have been urged to participate in the environmental impact analysis process. Additionally, special efforts were made to allow persons displaced by Hurricane Katrina participate in planning. Information and ideas provided by the participating public and agencies to date have been considered.

Initial Coordination by Mobile District Team. Soon after Katrina struck coastal Mississippi, the Mobile District made and received contacts with local government officials, agencies, and the public regarding the impacts of the storm and conditions on the coast. These contacts were encouraged by the existing working relationships established during the normal water resources activities conducted by Mobile District and the state and local governments. After the MSCIP authorization, Mobile District multi-discipline project teams went to each coastal Mississippi county and municipal area to assess damages and needs first hand and to discuss needs with local constituents. This coordination was a productive means for identifying needs and the brainstorming of ideas and opportunities.

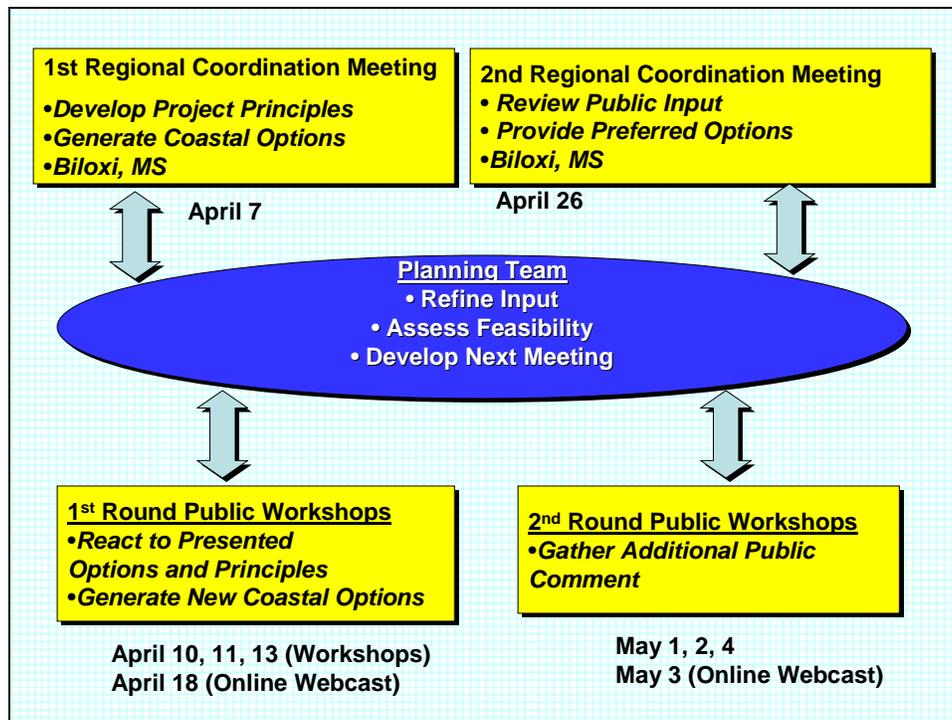


FIGURE 1. Schematic of the MsCIP public involvement process. The initial outreach by Mobile District staff is not shown but was a critical start o the process.

Public and Agency Involvement Process

To further solicit public input and collaborate with State, Federal, and local officials in gathering ideas, a facilitated two-step public involvement process was used. The process used is illustrated in Figure 1. The summary report of the public and agency involvement process is included as Appendix XX. Ten involvement workshop opportunities for public input into the

MSCIP planning process were held between April 7 and May 4, 2006. In addition a web-site, www.MSCIP.usace.army.mil was maintained as a repository of information and a vehicle to allow input to those who were displaced from their homes or could not attend the workshop opportunities. The web-site was continually up and running for public information during the project planning period.

Round One – Developing Guiding Principles and Generating Options.

Regional Coordination Workshop. A highly interactive Regional Coordination Workshop was held in Biloxi, MS, on April 7, 2006 for a group of state, municipal, county, NGOs, and agency officials. Approximately 200 participants were invited to attend the workshop through letters, e-mails and phone contacts. Approximately 75 individuals participated representing a spectrum of participant groups invited. Participants were asked to provide the Corps guiding principles for MSCIP direction and specific projects that should be included within the two plans for Congress. Over a hundred ideas were generated at the workshop. The ideas ranged from small local projects to coastal-wide submissions. The MSCIP Team reviewed these ideas or potential projects for consideration as near-term projects in the Interim Report or actions to be considered in the Final Report.

Public Workshops. Following the Regional Coordination Workshop, the Corps held three Public Workshops; April 10, 12, and 13, 2006. One workshop was held in each of the 3 coastal Mississippi counties, Jackson, Harrison, and Hancock. Invitations to participate in Public Workshops were made through a Mobile District Public Notice sent to standard environmental coordination mailing list, Mobile District press releases sent to the media, and by Mobile staff contacts. We asked state, county and local officials to help get word of the workshops out to the public.

The purpose of the workshops was to review the ideas already gathered from previous involvement activities and gather additional ideas for inclusion in the MSCIP reports and plans. The workshops were interactive and non-confrontational. Public participants were polled on project direction and the important principles of recovery that should be used in the plans. The public was invited to review the ideas already submitted and to add additional ideas or creative combinations of existing ideas to the list. Input could be provided via a network of PCs and structured questions. Alternative input opportunities for those uncomfortable or unable to respond via PC were also provided. Comment cards, post-it notes for maps, and a court reporter were available to capture ideas. Following the Public Workshops the list of MSCIP ideas grew to over 180. Again the MSCIP Team reviewed these ideas or potential projects for consideration as near-term projects in the Interim Report or actions to be considered in the Final Report.

It should be noted that the residents of coastal Mississippi have been through a terrific ordeal. In some cases, their lives have returned to normal while in others the recovery process is just beginning. These conditions made acquiring public input difficult. Frequent comments were made that people were generally “tired of the storm and tired of meetings about the storm.” In spite of that, needs and opportunities for specific areas were gathered from the public.

Web-site and Webcast. As discussed previously, the web-site www.MSCIP.usace.army.mil was established and maintained as a repository of MSCIP information and a different vehicle to allow interested public and agencies to provide comments and ideas including those who were displaced from their homes or could not attend the workshop opportunities.

A Webcast was created and provided on April 18 to allow those that could not attend the public workshops and online alternative for participating in the project. The Webcast had conference call participation for all callers, a video and PowerPoint presentation delivered through a special Webcast, polling, and a question and answer portion with Mobile District staff fielding questions. This interactive presentation lasted 1 hour.



FIGURE 2. MsCIP Jackson County Public Workshop, April 10. Receiving ideas using maps, aerial photography, and post-it notes.



FIGURE 3. MSCIP Jackson County Public Workshop. April 10. Receiving ideas using a presentation and directed questions via a PC Network.

Round Two – Review Planning Options that Emerged From Round One.

Regional Coordination Workshop. The Round Two, Regional Coordination Workshop was held in Biloxi, MS, on April 26, 2006 with similar participants as Round One. The purpose of the Round Two Regional Coordination Workshop was to review the planning options that emerged from the Round One workshops. Prior to the workshop, participants were provided

via the MsCIP website a list of ideas that emerged Round One and the screening criteria to be used to recommend near-term projects for inclusion in the Interim Report or retain them for evaluation in the Final Report. There was general understanding of the concept of near term projects that can be implemented quickly to help in the immediate recovery of coastal Mississippi while the Comprehensive Plan is being developed. The screening criteria and their application to the potential projects were discussed. The Mobile District presented a preliminary, by-county, list of projects to be potentially recommended in the Interim Report. The potential near-term projects were discussed and none recommended for Interim Report received objection. However, participants requested review of a limited number of additional projects for inclusion in the Interim Report. As a result of this discussion additional projects were considered and at least one additional potential near-term project (Jackson Marsh Restoration) was recommended for the Interim Report. No potential projects were deleted from consideration in the MSCIP, simply deferred to consideration in the Comprehensive Analysis and Final Report.

Public Workshops. The Round Two, Public Workshops were held May 1, 2, and 4, 2006. The purpose of the Round Two Public Workshops was to review the planning options that emerged from the Round One workshops and discuss recommendations for near-term projects to be recommended in the Interim Report. The Mobile District presented a by-county list of projects to be potentially recommended in the Interim Report and the screening criteria for selecting those projects. None of the projects recommended for Interim Report received objection. However, participants requested and received clarification regarding why specific potential projects were not recommended as near-term projects. No potential projects were deleted from consideration in the MSCIP, simply deferred to consideration in the Comprehensive Analysis and Final Report.

Web-site and Webcast. A Round Two Webcast was created and provided on May 3, 18 to allow those that could not attend the public workshops and online alternative for participating in the project. None of the projects recommended for Interim Report received objection. However, participants requested and received clarification regarding why specific potential projects were not recommended as near-term projects.