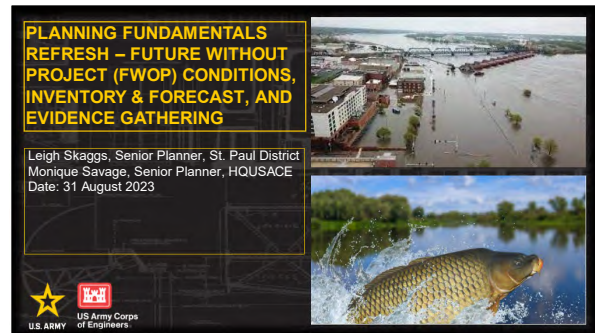


This webinar is part of the Planning Fundamental Series and offered an overview of Future Without Project Condition, Inventory and Forecast, and Evidence Gathering, which are critical planning tasks both in the early stages of any USACE planning investigation and throughout the investigation. Senior Planners Leigh Skaggs (St. Paul District) and Monique Savage (HQUSACE) explained how the Future Without Project Condition is the single most important planning scenario to establish, as it helps guide plan formulation as well as provides the baseline against which all alternative plans are evaluated.



This summary of the Question/Answer session of the webinar is not a transcription; questions and responses have been edited and reordered for clarity.

Evidence Gathering

Study teams use a variety of data sets when developing and forecasting the “future without project” condition.

How do study teams use land use / land cover (LULC) datasets?

Land use / land cover is used by study teams to describe how their proposed alternatives impact planned land use in the study area. LULC can describe broad land use characteristics such as urban, rural, agriculture, etc., but it can also be narrowed down to describe specific habitats such as ephemeral wetland delineation.

What is considered critical infrastructure?

Critical infrastructure includes structures in the floodplain that are critical to the nation or a particular region. Critical infrastructure elements include infrastructure that has tremendous service value, such as utilities or bridges; infrastructure that is important to the community, such as schools, fire departments, or hospitals; or facilities that pose risks to the population due to the presence of hazardous materials, such as chemical facilities.

Data Needs and Level of Detail

Is modeling and forecasting for climate change, sea level rise, and other variables expected for Federal Interest Determinations?

No modeling is needed for the Federal Interest Determination except in extreme circumstances. Qualitative forecasting and the use of available data is generally sufficient to establish the preliminary Future Without Project condition for the Federal Interest Determination.

Identifying Metrics and Indicators in All Four Accounts: Comprehensive Benefits

What is the right level of “comprehensiveness” required by the January 2021 Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works policy directive, [Comprehensive Documentation of Benefits in Decision Documents](#)?

It depends based on the study, its authorized purpose, the study objectives, etc. The memo directs USACE planning study teams to evaluate and provide a complete accounting, consideration, and documentation of the total benefits of alternative plans across all benefit categories, encompassing economic (national and regional), environmental (national and regional), and social considerations.

How do study teams determine the metrics/indicators and appropriate level of detail necessary to evaluate and compare alternatives in consideration of the Other Social Effects and Environmental Quality accounts? Are there USACE certified models available for either of these accounts?

There are USACE certified models for Environmental Quality (EQ) and Other Social Effects (OSE) models. We recommend teams check with the Ecosystem Planning Center of Expertise and Economics Sub-Community of Practice for the most current list of certified/available for use models. For example, all of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Habitat Suitability Index models are certified for use in evaluating effects to certain species under the EQ account, which may be appropriate to use to develop and assess mitigation alternatives to mitigate for impacts to valued resources. As another example, the HEC-FIA model is certified to estimate life safety impacts under the OSE account.

There are several ways for study teams to determine the metrics/indicators and level of detail appropriate for their study. The metrics will depend on what is most relevant to the team’s study, so as teams define their planning objectives, they should simultaneously identify what metrics to use to quantify benefits. Similarly, as teams identify constraints and considerations, they should identify metrics to quantify/qualify the effects of each alternative on those constraints.

Level of detail will be determined by the uncertainty and associated risk of being able to quantify/qualify the effects of your alternatives. For example, if there are no known threatened and endangered species in a study area, a team may assume there is low risk that a “taking” (under the Endangered Species Act) will occur, and therefore there is no need to collect any survey data. On the other hand, if there are known threatened and endangered species in a study area, the team will most likely have a high level of uncertainty regarding the location and magnitude of risks to threatened and endangered species, and so may opt to collect survey data to reduce the mitigation costs associated with possible takings. During the scoping phase teams should identify the uncertainty and risks associated with their project and critically think about ways to reduce these uncertainties. Teams will present the uncertainties with their data/analysis and make a recommendation to the vertical team on which risks need to be managed and how to manage them. Examples of risk reduction in studies typically consist of, but are not limited to, collecting additional data, conducting additional analysis, conducting sensitivity analysis of various forecasts, or using a worst case (conservative) estimate.