

FINDING OF NO PRACTICABLE ALTERNATIVE (FONPA)
OMAO Lease Acquisition for Uncrewed Maritime Systems Headquarters and Pier Space in
Gulfport, Mississippi
January 2023

Pursuant to floodplain management requirements under 24 CFR 55.20, EO 11988 (Floodplain Management) and EO 11990 (Wetlands Protection), NOAA must find there are no practicable alternatives to construct in a floodplain or wetland, and to do so, all practicable measures should be taken to minimize harm to the floodplain and wetland. The practicability of a given alternative is evaluated by considering such pertinent factors as operational impact and environmental impact with respect to the overall project purpose.

NOAA's Uncrewed Maritime Systems (UMS) program will be based in the existing Ocean Enterprise Facility (OEF). NOAA vessels will be located at the east pier at the Port of Gulfport. Only minor construction activities, including extension of additional utilities to the pier to support NOAA vessels, addition of fencing along the existing piers, and addition of a security gate, are planned. The entire Project area is in the 100-year floodplain and high hazard area. Previous development activity has irretrievably altered the floodplain, reducing the beneficial aspects of the natural floodplain and wetlands functions. No wetlands exist within the Project area. The need for pier access for NOAA research vessels limits alternatives outside the floodplain. The Proposed Action would not increase flood frequency or severity at the proposed project area or at downgradient or nearby locations.

NOAA has determined that there is no practicable alternative for locating the project in a portion of the flood zone. This is due to: 1) NOAA research vessels must be located on the water and 2) proposed shoreside support facilities must be situated near the new pier to support the functions of NOAA vessels. Locating the USM in the floodplain cannot be avoided, and there is no practicable alternative to the Proposed Action. As described, minor construction in the floodplain will occur to facilitate the operations, and this also cannot be avoided and there is no practicable alternative.

After careful consideration of the information presented in the EA, NOAA finds there is no practicable alternative to locating the Project in the floodplain. NOAA further finds that all practicable measures have been taken to minimize harm to floodplain and wetland. This finding fulfills the requirements of EOs, 11988, Floodplain Management, and 11990, Protection of Wetlands.