



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Institute for Water Resources

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USACE IWR Advances Consistent Methodological Approach for Considering Social Vulnerability and Other Social Effects

ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA. It's not uncommon for the fundamental objective of Federal water resources investments (i.e., the "general welfare" of the American people – or, in other words, to improve the quality of people's lives) to get lost in the investment decision-making complexity of economic data and science necessary for project analysis. But there's long been interest in assessing "others social effects" and for both stakeholders and project sponsors to more fully understand the impacts that Federal agency decisions can have on civil society beyond the direct economic return.

Recognizing this assessment need, the Institute for Water Resources has published two reports and a white paper revolving around social vulnerability and other social effects. *Other Social Effects: A Primer* is intended to help those within USACE and those who work with USACE to understand the contribution that Other Social Effects (OSE) analysis can make to developing sound water resources plans. It examines how OSE analysis is conducted in the planning process, as well as the tools and methods available for accomplishing it.

Applying Other Social Effects in Alternatives Analysis is meant to assist planners at the USACE district level by providing a practical framework and approach for the use of OSE in alternative development and evaluation. The framework and approach are general. Planners are encouraged to adapt the process as appropriate based on local conditions and experience. The paper uses the Fargo-Moorhead flood risk management study to illustrate the application of OSE. However, the approach can be used in all major USACE business lines, such as navigation and eco restoration. Additional information about the approach for other business lines can be found in the *Other Social Effects Handbook*, previously published by IWR.

"Social vulnerability analysis is one of the most consistent and widely used methods for informing and addressing Other Social Effects in the USACE water resources planning process. These user-friendly products are the result of the visionary work by the Institute's public-private sector team since 2010 to provide USACE planners with contemporary analytic tools and methods to streamline and ensure more consistent and defensible assessments of social impacts for USACE projects," said Bob Pietrowsky, IWR Director. Early in this process the team developing the overall approach selected the "Social Vulnerability Index" (SoVI) as its basic method for characterizing social vulnerability. The primary purpose of *Social Vulnerability Analysis: A Comparison of Tools*, a whitepaper, is to provide the rationale for the choice of this method by comparing and contrasting the SoVI with several other approaches for addressing social vulnerability issues in planning situations.

"Social effects, in a water resources context, refer to how the constituents of life that influence personal and group definitions of satisfaction, well-being, and happiness are affected by some water resources condition or proposed intervention," said Dunning and Durden in their 2009 *Handbook on Applying 'Other Social Effects' Factors in Corps of Engineers Water Resources Planning*. Together, these three new papers assist the USACE community in accounting for these effects in its water resources planning process.

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