US Army Corps of Engineers®
Buffalo District

Section 1135 of Water Resources Development Act of 1986 Study: Project Modifications for Improvement of the Environment

Scajaquada Creek, Town of Cheektowaga, New York

Scoping Information

June 2024

Buffalo District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
478 Main Street
Buffalo, New York 14202

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1 INTRODUCTION

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) directs federal agencies to initiate "an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the significant issues related to the proposed action." The Buffalo District - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has prepared this scoping information to elicit public and agency concerns, clearly define the environmental issues and alternatives that should be examined, and identify federal, state, and local requirements that may need to be addressed in the study of the proposed project modifications for improvement of the environment project in the Town of Cheektowaga, New York. This information has been prepared as part of the formal scoping process pursuant to NEPA and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA (40 CFR Part 1500 et seq.). This scoping document describes the proposed implementation of ecosystem restoration measures to improve the environment and to offset negative impacts of the Scajaquada Creek Flood Risk Management (FRM) project.

2 BACKGROUND

Draining approximately 29 square miles, the Scajaquada Creek watershed (12-digit Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC-12) 042701010801) consists of the mainstem and several unnamed tributaries. Scajaquada Creek originates in the Town of Lancaster and flows through the Town of Cheektowaga and the City of Buffalo. Three sections of the mainstem of Scajaquada Creek are routed through underground tunnels. Scajaquada Drain is the longest of these tunnels, flowing beneath the eastern portion of the City of Buffalo for approximately 3.2 miles. Scajaquada Creek drains into the Niagara River at the Black Rock Channel in Erie County, New York.

The Scajaquada Creek FRM project is located within the Town of Cheektowaga, Erie County, New York (42°55'07.74" North, 78°45'58.39" West) (Figure 1). The FRM project includes approximately 1.8 miles of the main stem of Scajaquada Creek and 4.3 miles of tributaries (Figure 2). The project is bordered by Pine Ridge Road to the west, the Kensington Expressway (State Route 33) to the north, Dick Road to the east, and Galleria Drive to the south. Scajaquada Creek watershed is highly urbanized, with an estimated population of 174,209. To support and sustain this development, Scajaquada Creek has been channelized and significantly manipulated in multiple reaches. According to the 2021 National Land Cover Database (NLCD) developed by the United States Geological Survey (USGS), land use within Scajaquada Creek watershed is 95.7 percent developed, 1.65 percent planted or agricultural, 1.43 percent open water or wetlands, and 1.25 percent forested (Figure 3) (Dewitz, 2023). Scajaquada Creek has been heavily degraded as a result of direct modifications to its channel, urban land use, human encroachment, and pollution. Over four miles of the main channel of Scajaquada Creek have been re-routed through underground tunnels in three different sections. Additionally, the main stem of Scajaquada Creek and many of its tributaries have been channelized through developed urban areas, including throughout the FRM project.

Prior to construction of the FRM project, Scajaquada Creek experienced repetitive flooding, with property damage documented in the floods of 1937, 1942, 1945, 1946, 1963, and 1967 (Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District, 2002). In 1950, the USACE, in partnership with the Village of Depew, completed a clearing and snagging project along 7,700 feet of Scajaquada Creek. Channel widening projects were completed in multiple reaches of Scajaquada Creek by local municipalities in 1959 and 1962 (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1963). The federal Scajaquada Creek FRM project was constructed by the USACE in partnership with NYSDEC to address these flooding concerns in the Town of Cheektowaga in 1981. In the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the FRM project, the USACE identified significant and long-lasting impacts to the environment resulting from construction of the FRM project. Development within the Scajaquada Creek watershed continued to increase after construction of the FRM project. Notably, the Walden Galleria Mall was constructed in the late 1980s on top of wetland and floodplain habitat in the Town of Cheektowaga (Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District, 2002).

The area's native vegetation is sparse, and mostly comprised of mowed grass, ornamental non-native trees, and some ornamental native trees such as Eastern Cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*). Wildlife currently utilizing the lower Scajaquada Creek include snapping turtles, beaver, foxes, and mink (Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper, 2008). As well as many species of songbirds, raptors (e.g., owls, eagles, hawks), and waterfowl (e.g. ducks, herons, swans) utilize the watershed. Fish that utilize the aquatic habitat of the creek include many native species of fish such as northern pike (*Esox lucius*), yellow perch (*Perca flavescens*), bass (largemouth and smallmouth), steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), many species of panfish (*Lepomis spp.*), suckers, minnows, and shiners (USFWS, 2011). The creek's dominant species of submerged aquatic vegetation include wild celery (*Vallisneria americana*), Eurasian milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*), and coontail (*Ceratophyllum demersum*) (USFWS, 2011).

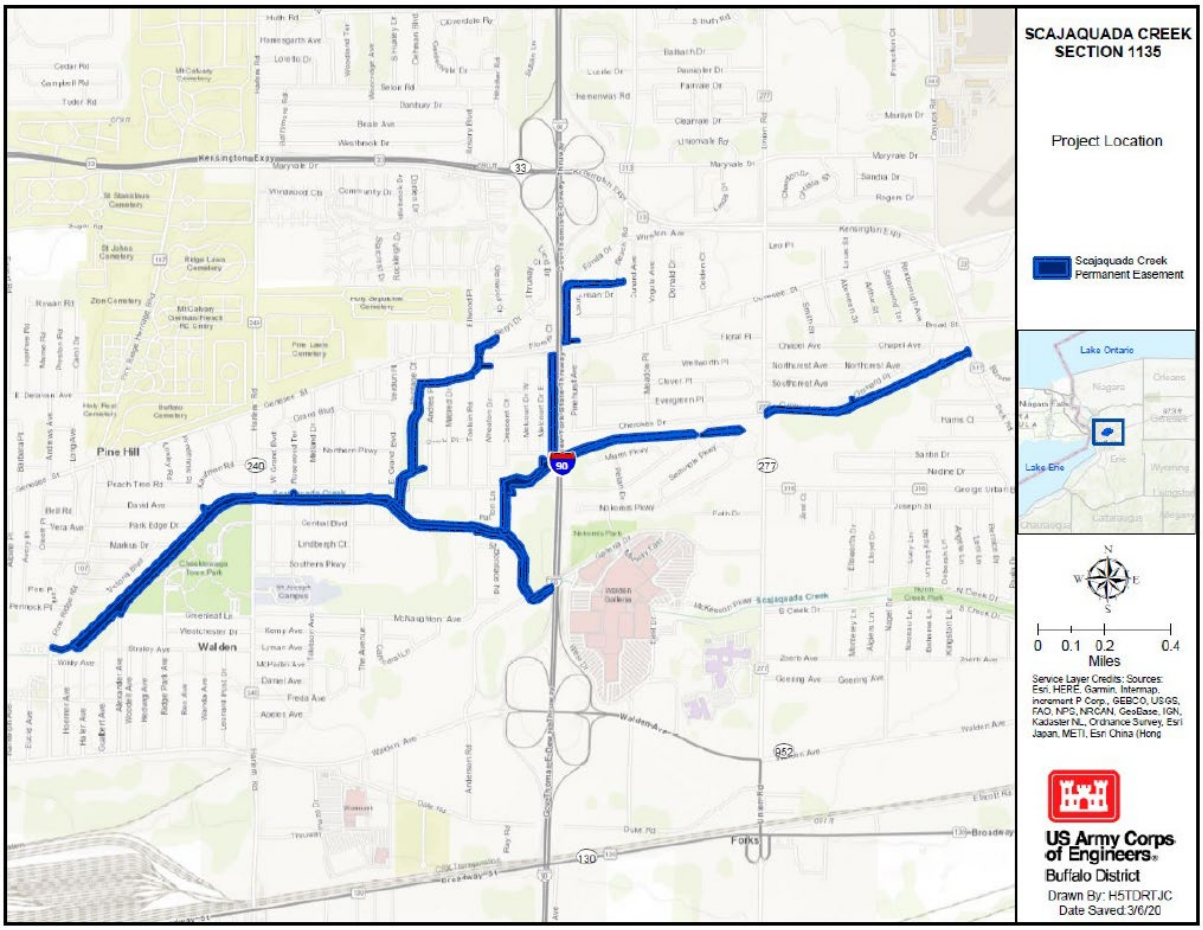

Figure 1. Limits of the USACE Scajaquada Creek Flood Risk Management Project, located within the Town of Cheektowaga, New York (Source: USACE).

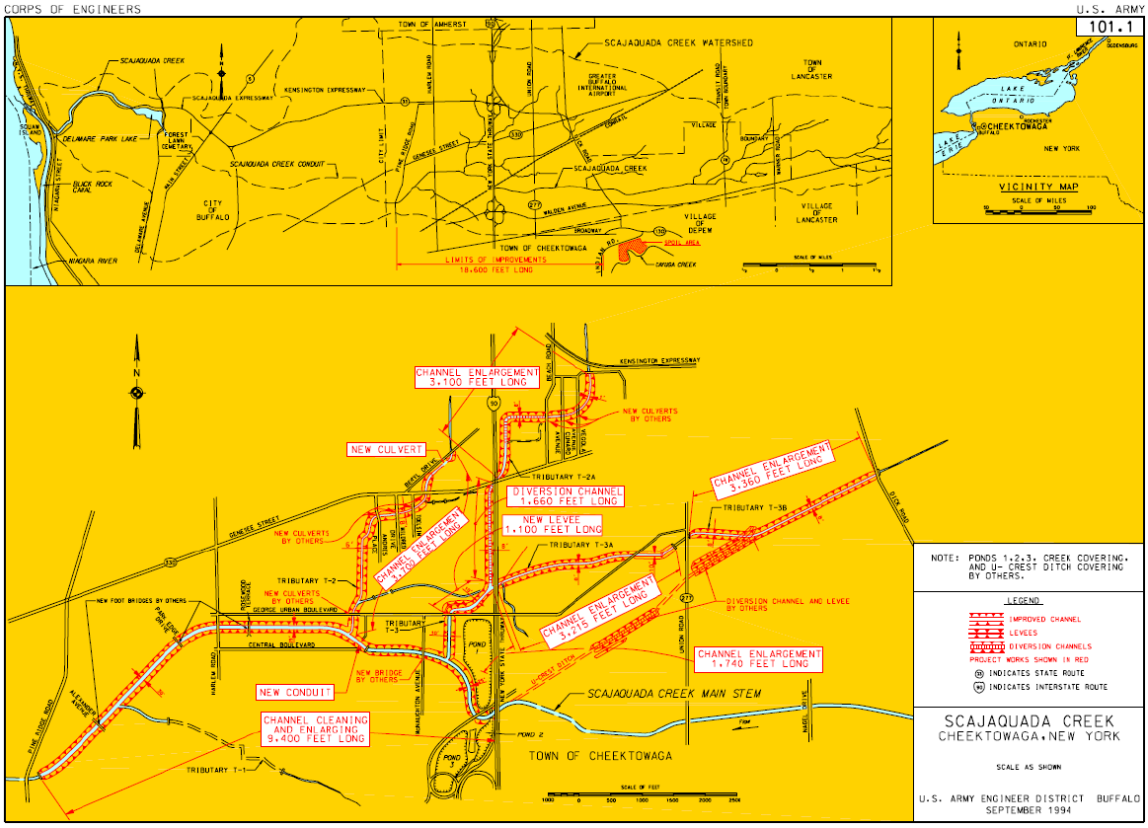

Figure 2. USACE Scajaquada Creek Flood Risk Management (FRM) Federal project map.

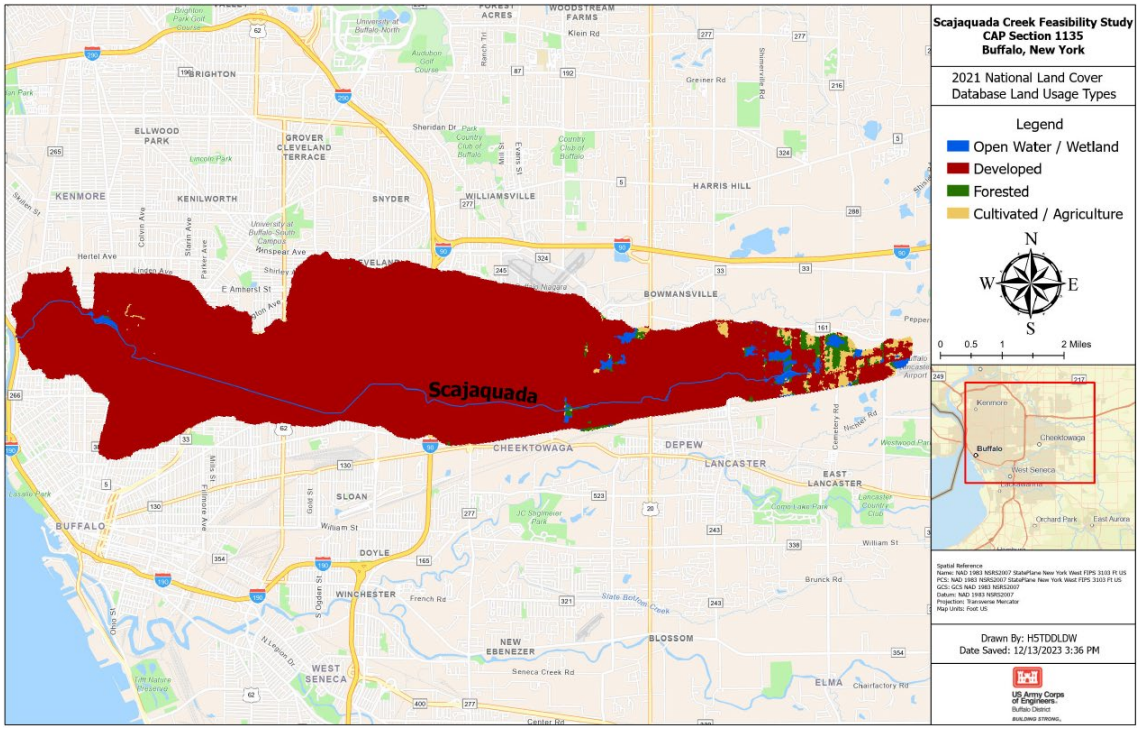

Figure 3. Land cover within the Scajaquada Creek watershed.

3 NEED FOR ACTION AND STUDY OVERVIEW

Constructed in 1981, the Scajaquada Creek FRM project was designed to provide the town of Cheektowaga protection from floods with an average recurrence interval of 100 years. While this project has been successful in managing flood risk to the surrounding area, construction of the FRM project has resulted in adverse effects to the aquatic habitat of Scajaquada creek and its six tributaries. These habitat impacts are primarily the result of channelization, modification to the natural hydraulic and sediment regime, removal and mowing of riparian vegetation, and clearing and snagging activities conducted to construct and maintain the FRM project. Due to these adverse impacts, Scajaquada Creek's water quality, hydrologic and sediment regimes, riparian corridor, wildlife and aquatic habitat, and overall health of the watershed have been severely degraded.

This study evaluates the feasibility of implementing ecosystem restoration measures to improve the environment and to offset negative impacts of the Scajaquada Creek FRM federal project. Measures developed as part of this study will maintain the flood risk reduction benefits of the FRM project while restoring the environment to a less degraded condition. Measures that may increase or transfer flood risk to the surrounding community cannot be recommended for implementation under the Section 1135 authority.

Section 1135 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1986 (as amended) authorizes the USACE to modify structures and operations of water resources projects constructed by the USACE, or jointly by the USACE, for the purpose of improving the quality of the environment when it is determined that such modifications are technically feasible, are consistent with the authorized project purposes, and will improve the quality of the environment in the public interest. Additionally, if it is determined that a USACE water resources project has contributed to the degradation of the quality of the environment, restoration measures may be implemented at the project site or at other locations affected by the construction or operation of the project, if such measures do not conflict with the authorized project purposes. Under this authority, ecosystem restoration projects do not need to modify an existing Corps project, in accordance with Engineer Pamphlet (EP) 1105-2-58 paragraph 37(a), (b)(2).

4 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

4.1 Project Goals

The goal of this project is to improve the quality of the environment and aquatic habitat at sites within the vicinity of the Scajaquada Creek FRM project (Figure 4). The completion of this project is anticipated to provide additional habitat for aquatic species and greater habitat connectivity, as well as establish a more productive aquatic community for water-dependent wildlife. Habitat features may include: (1) wetland establishment to provide an increase in the acreage of high quality wetland habitat in the watershed; (2) expansion of existing wetlands to increase the acreage of high quality wetland habitat in the watershed while also providing habitat connectivity benefits; (3) enhancement of existing wetlands to improve the quality, although not the acreage, of wetland habitat in the watershed; (4) establishment or enhancement of a riparian buffer to improve the quality of the riparian habitat; (5) concrete channel naturalization; (6) removal of culverts or flow control structures to increase habitat connectivity and improve substrates; (7) two-stage channel construction for increased stream stability and sediment transport and filtration; (8) invasive plant species removal; and (9) native plant species re-establishment.

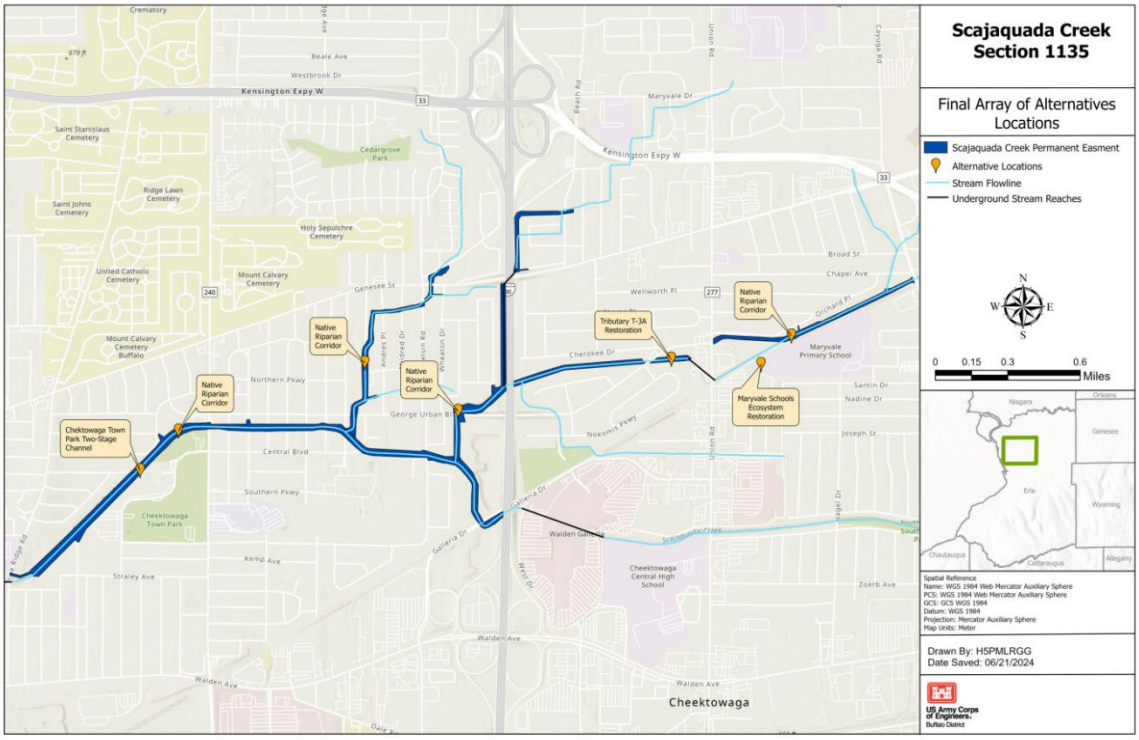

Figure 4. Project alternative locations on Scajaquada Creek.

4.2 Alternatives

4.2.1 Without Project Alternative (No Action)

USACE is required to consider the option of "No Action" as an alternative in order to comply with the requirements of NEPA. The no-action plan, or without-project condition, assumes that

no project would be implemented by the federal government and forms the basis against which all other alternative plans are measured. For this project, the No Action alternative assumes no new federal action will be taken to improve the environment and offset negative impacts of the Scajaquada Creek FRM project in the study area.

4.2.2 Native Riparian Corridor

The Native Riparian Corridor alternative represents a relatively low-cost method of vegetative restoration through invasive species management and native species plantings along Scajaquada Creek and its some of its tributaries as seen in Figures 4 and 5. Implementation of this alternative would not require excavation or earth disturbance beyond that required for plantings and invasive species removal. The spatial scope of this alternative will be limited to the parcels owned by the Town of Cheektowaga within the Scajaquada Creek FRM Project. Specific locations for plantings will be identified following existing condition surveys conducted in summer of 2024. Invasive species removal and subsequent native plantings can improve the quality of the riparian corridor, help filter pollutants out of stormwater, slow runoff before entering the creek, reduce erosion, attract native pollinators, and support native wildlife. However, USACE policy limits invasive species treatment to a one-time application during construction. This limitation may impact the sustainability of plant community improvements implemented and ultimately result in reduced ability to realize expected benefits, or lower ecological outputs.

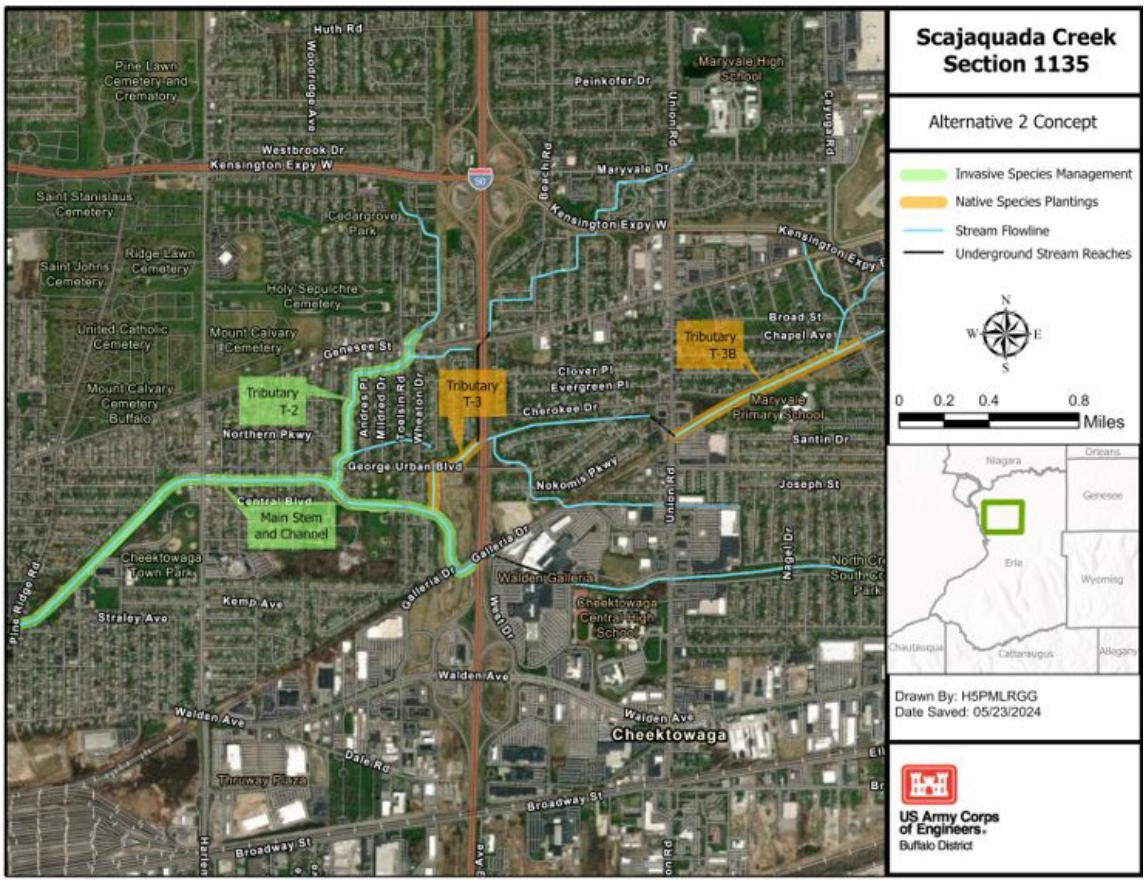

Figure 5. Alternative 2: Proposed site layout of the Native Riparian Corridor.

4.2.3 Maryvale Schools Ecosystem Restoration

The Maryvale Schools Ecosystem Restoration alternative includes construction of a two-stage channel in Tributary T-3B, removal of a flow control gate along an unnamed tributary to Scajaquada Creek, enhancement and expansion of an existing wetland on site, potential wetland creation along the stream channel and within adjacent baseball fields, invasive species treatment, and native plantings. The two-stage channel will provide flood protection benefits while also restoring connectivity to the floodplain and allowing sediment capture. Removal of the flow control structure would restore connectivity of this drainage to the mainstem and surrounding wetland area. Conversion of the baseball fields to wetland area (Figure 6) will also significantly increase wetland habitat acreage and, in combination with other wetland measures, provide a substantial riparian buffer. During initial coordination with Maryvale Schools on this alternative, it was conveyed that this alternative may need to be revised to eliminate wetland cells proposed within the boundaries of the existing baseball diamonds due to continued use by recreational leagues. There are also opportunities to partner with Maryvale Schools to incorporate recreational or educational features into the project design to better integrate the natural environment into the classroom setting.

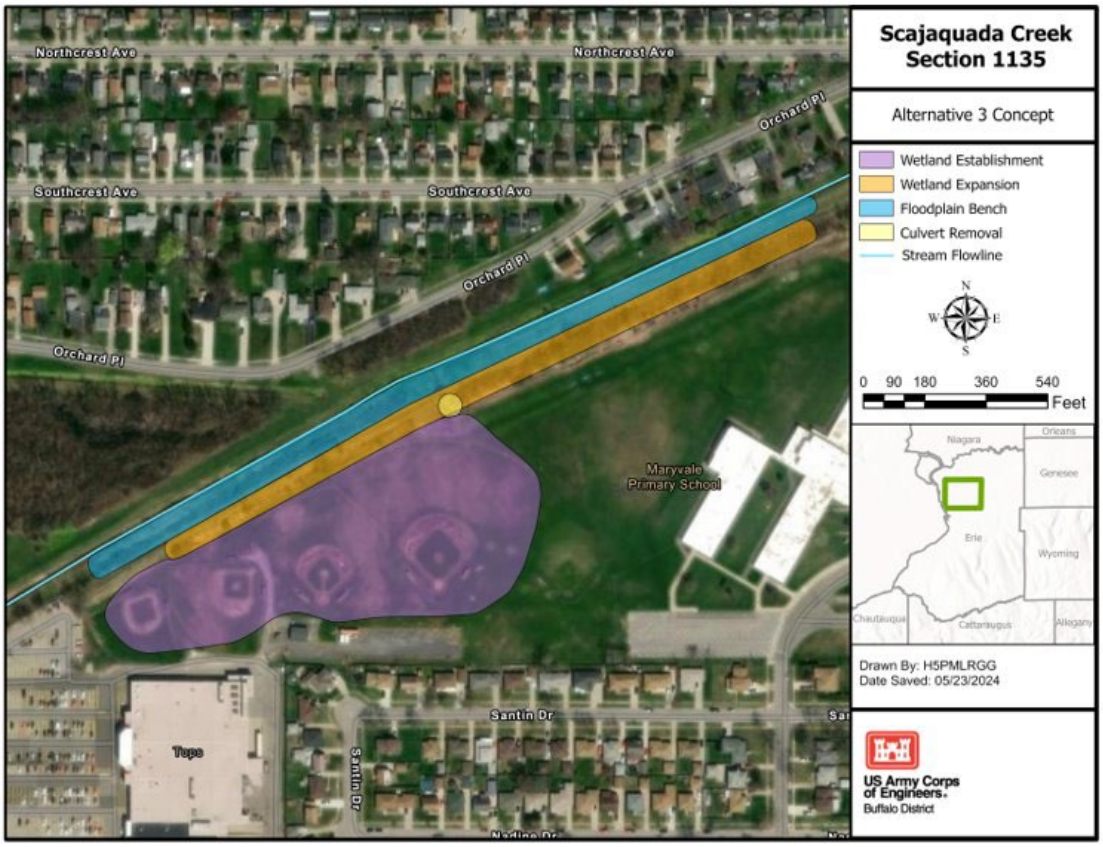

Figure 6. Alternative 3: Proposed site layout of the Maryvale Schools Ecosystem Restoration.

4.2.4 Tributary T-3A Restoration

The Tributary T-3A Restoration alternative centers around removal of concrete bank structures placed along a short reach of the project. This alternative would remove the concrete banks and regrade the resulting streambank to a gentler slope to mitigate for potential negative impacts to the FRM project through increased channel roughness. The streambank would then be planted to provide in-stream cover, wildlife habitat, and stability benefits. Due to the proximity of surrounding residential development, space available to implement this alternative is limited and, therefore, further analysis is required to ensure removal of the concrete will not result in changes to water surface elevations or flood risk within the study area (Figure 7). If such changes are likely to occur, this alternative will be eliminated from further consideration.

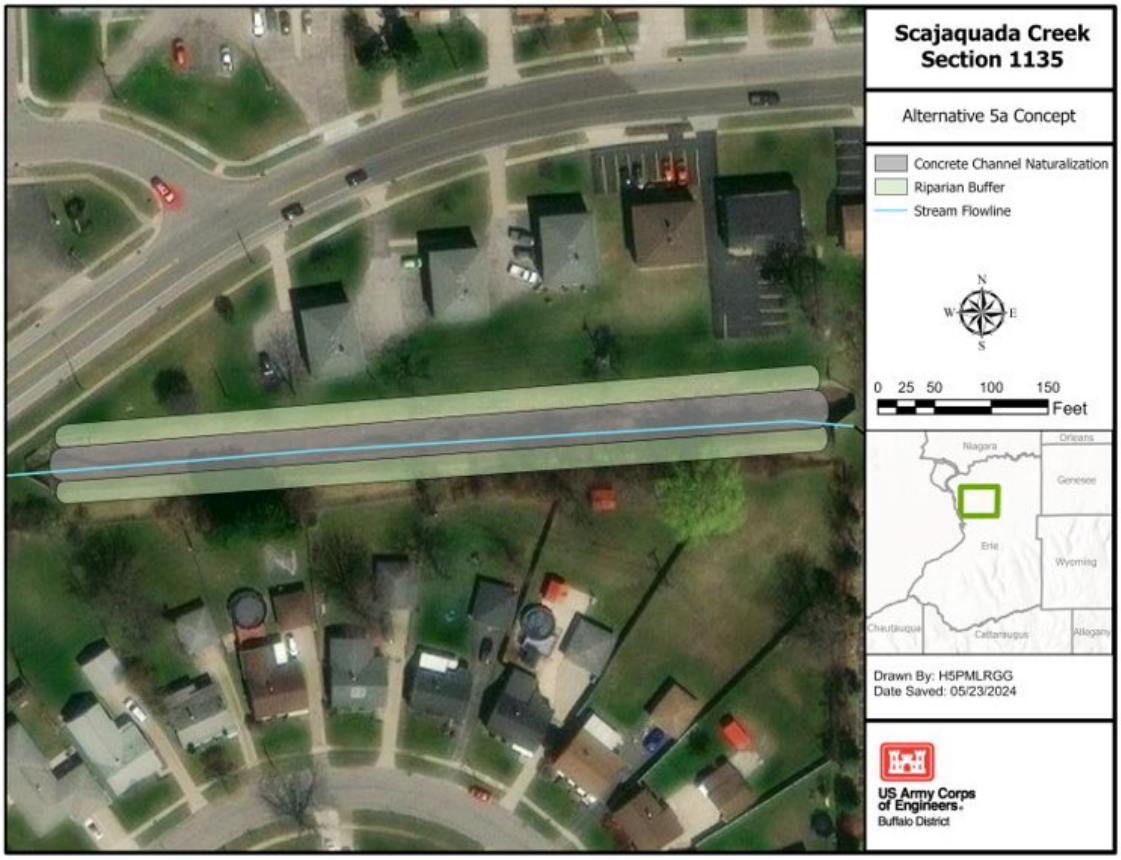

Figure 7. Alternative 5a: Proposed site layout of the Tributary t-3A Restoration.

4.2.5 Cheektowaga Town Park Two-Stage Channel

The mainstem of Scajaquada Creek flows through Cheektowaga Town Park. Restoration of this stretch of Scajaquada Creek provides opportunities for floodplain reconnection, recreational features, and public interaction with the creek. This alternative consists of construction of a two-stage channel along the length of Scajaquada Creek within Cheektowaga Town Park and implementation of a 100-ft minimum width riparian buffer on the southern bank of Scajaquada Creek (Figure 8). This alternative can be combined with locally led trail improvements to provide additional educational or recreational features and increase public interaction with the restoration project. A utility line running along the creek serves a constraint on the width of the floodplain that can be constructed on this property.

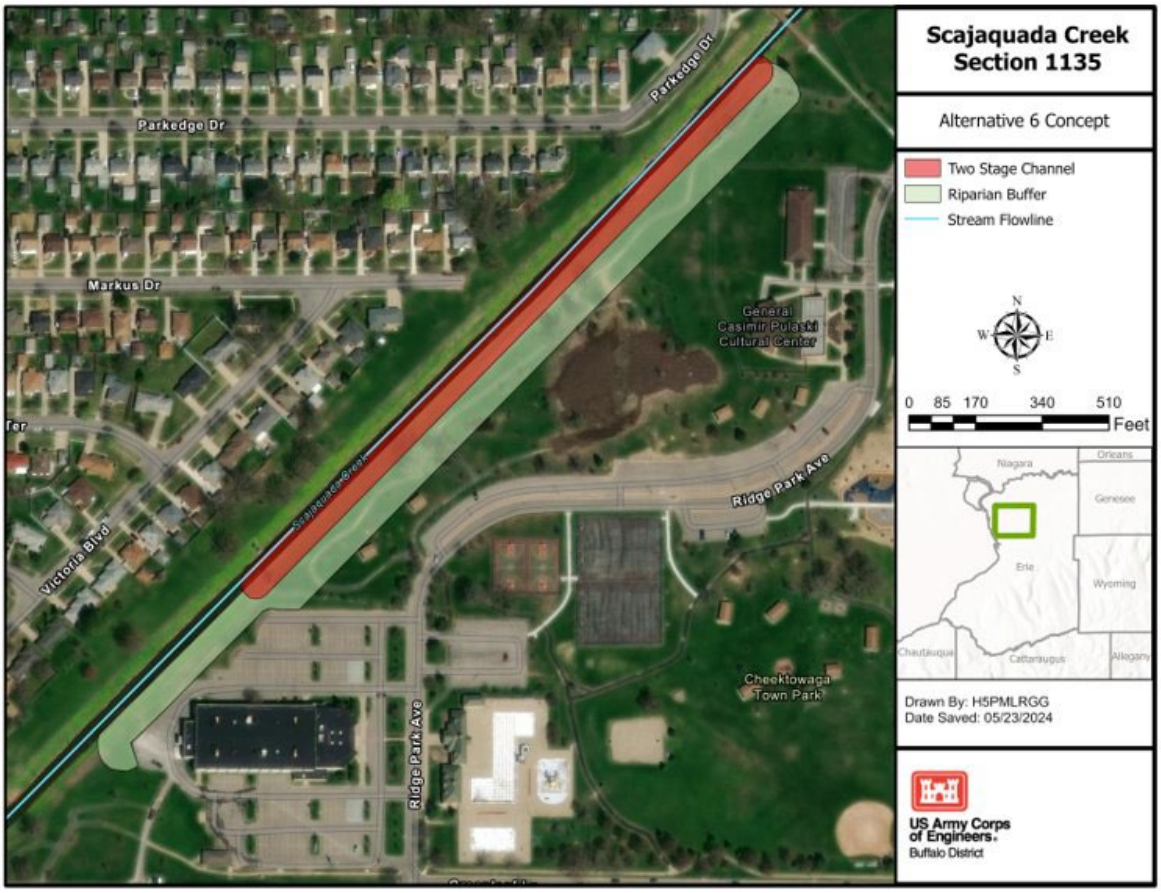

Figure 8. Alternative 6: Proposed site layout of the Cheektowaga Town Park Two-Stage Channel.

4.2.6 T-3 Wetland Complex

This alternative is located along the western bank of Tributary T-3 along George Urban Blvd and I-90 behind residential development. This alternative proposes to modify the channel of Tributary T-3 to lay back the banks and reconnect the stream with the floodplain. Due to limitations associated with slope and George Urban Blvd, a 100-ft riparian buffer is proposed only along the northern streambank. The riparian buffer will then connect to a newly established wetland area. This concept provides lateral habitat connectivity between the stream, floodplain, and wetland, but in-stream habitat connectivity is limited by the presence of culverts immediately upstream and downstream of the proposed site. Additional concerns regarding adjacent power utility infrastructure, excavation, and cost effectiveness may limit the feasibility of this alternative.

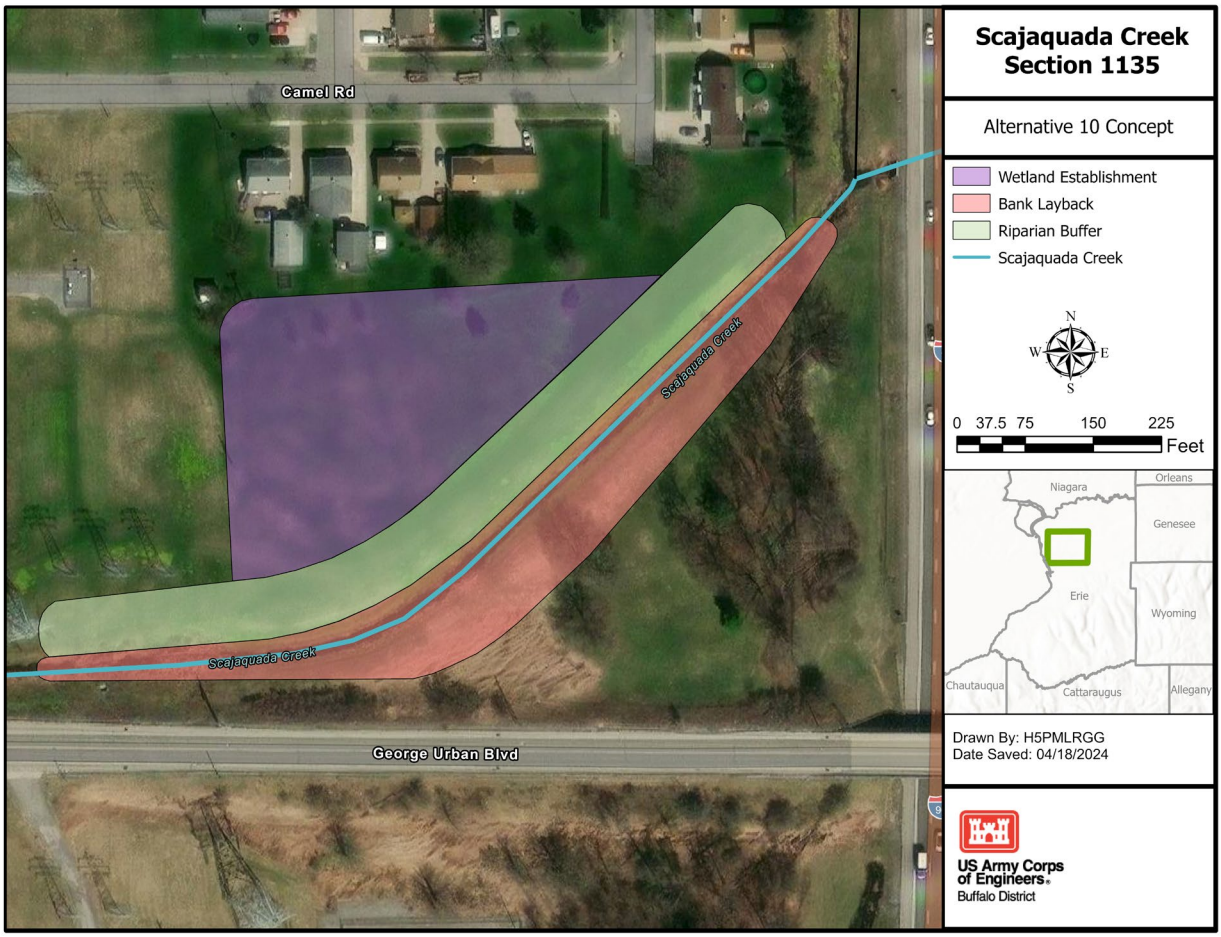

Figure 9. Alternative 10: Proposed site layout of the T-3 Wetland Complex

5 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The with and without project (No Action) conditions will be assessed in relation to several parameters including but not necessarily limited to the following social, economic, and environmental categories:

- Fish and Wildlife Resources
- Water Quality
- Dredged Material Management
- Geology and Soils
- Contaminated Materials
- Air Quality
- Noise
- Recreation
- Historic Properties
- Property Values and Tax Revenues
- Employment
- Community Cohesion and Growth
- Transportation
- Public Facilities and Services
- Aesthetics
- Environmental Justice

6 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND INTERAGENCY COORDINATION

Throughout the scoping process, stakeholders and interested parties are invited to provide comments on the proposed action that will be evaluated as part the proposed ecosystem restoration project. An Environmental Assessment will eventually be completed to document the evaluation of the potential social, economic, and environmental benefits and potential adverse impacts that would result from the proposed action.

7 COMPLIANCE WITH ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION STATUTES

Numerous environmental laws and executive orders influence and guide water resources planning, development, and management within the USACE civil works program. Table 2 presents a comprehensive list of environmental protection statutes, executive orders, etc. that are normally considered. Therefore, an additional goal of this scoping process is to consult with appropriate agencies and other interested parties pertaining to resources protected by these mandates. The dissemination of this scoping information initiates applicable coordination and consultation requirements required under their provisions.

Some important federal environmental protection statutes that will be addressed include the**:**

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). In accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality's "Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the NEPA of 1969" (40 CFR 1500-1508) and Engineer Regulation 200-2-2 (Procedures for Implementing NEPA), the USACE - Buffalo District will assess the potential environmental effects of the proposed action on the quality of the human environment. Using a systematic and interdisciplinary approach, an assessment will be made of the potential environmental impacts for the proposed action as judged by comparing the with-project and without-project conditions. The impact assessment process will determine if an Environmental Impact Statement is required, or if an Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact is appropriate.

Clean Water Act. If the recommended plan involves the placement of dredged or fill material into the waters of the United States, the USACE - Buffalo District will evaluate the discharge in accordance with the Clean Water Act Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines. Water quality and related information used in this evaluation will provide documentation to demonstrate that the recommended plan is in compliance with this Act. A Section 404(a) Public Notice will be circulated and an opportunity to request a public hearing will be afforded to all potentially affected parties. Section 401 Water Quality Certification for the discharge would also be requested from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC).

Endangered Species Act. In accordance with Section 7 of this Act, USACE is requesting information from the USFWS on any listed or proposed species, or designated or proposed critical habitat that may be present in the project area. According to the USFWS Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) tool, accessed 10 June 2024, the Scajaquada Creek watershed

is within the range of one federally listed endangered species: the northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*). Additionally, the Scajaquada Creek watershed is within the range of the salamander mussel (*Simpsonaias ambigua*), which is currently proposed as endangered, and the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), which is a candidate species (USFWS, 2023). Impacts to both bald and golden eagles will also be considered, though the birds are not currently federally listed. Potential impacts to these species (Table 1) from any alternative plan must be coordinated with USFWS.

Table 1: Federally Listed Species and Critical Habitat(s) in the Scajaquada Creek Watershed

Common Name	Scientific Name	Group	Status
Northern long-eared Bat	*Myotis septentrionalis*	Mammals	Endangered
Salamander mussel	*Simpsonaias ambigua*	Clams	Proposed Endangered
Monarch Butterfly	*Danaus plexippus*	Insects	Candidate

*Status as of 10 June 2024

Further coordination will be required with the USFWS and ODNR to identify species within the project area to avoid and/or minimize impacts to these species. This may include surveys to identify the presence of such species within the project areas.

Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act. The USACE is coordinating this study with the USFWS. The USACE will collaborate with the USFWS to identify fish and wildlife concerns, identify relevant information on the study area, obtain their views concerning the significance of fish and wildlife resources and anticipated project impacts, and identify those resources which need to be evaluated in the study. Full consideration will be given to their comments and recommendations resulting from this coordination.

National Historic Preservation Act. In accordance with Section 106 of this Act, the USACE will coordinate with the National Park Service, State Historic Preservation Office, potentially interested Tribal Nations, and local historic preservation organizations regarding multiple potential project locations. This scoping process initiates consultation with these entities and others likely to have knowledge of, or concern with, historic properties that may be present within the study's Areas of Potential Effect (APE). The APE for each alternative is limited to the alternative's footprint and viewshed. The need for cultural resources surveys and further coordination with applicable parties will be evaluated as a follow-up to this initial consultation and based on any information received. Initial review of the study areas has determined that Maryvale School, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historical Places.

Table 2: Federal Environmental Protection Laws, Orders, and Policies

1. PUBLIC LAWS

(a) American Folklife Preservation Act, P.L. 94-201; 20 U.S.C. 2101, *et seq.*
(b) Anadromous Fish Conservation Act, P.L. 89-304; 16 U.S.C. 757, *et seq.*
(c) Antiquities Act of 1906, P.L. 59-209; 16 U.S.C. 431, *et seq.*
(d) Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act, P.L. 93-291; 16 U.S.C. 469, *et seq.* (Also known as the Reservoir Salvage Act of 1960, as amended; P.L. 93-291, as amended; the Moss-Bennett Act; and the Preservation of Historic and Archaeological Data Act of 1974.)
(e) Bald Eagle Act; 16 U.S.C. 668.
(f) Clean Air Act, as amended; P.L. 91-604; 42 U.S.C. 1857h-7, *et seq.*
(g) Clean Water Act, P.L. 92-500; 33 U.S.C. 1251, *et seq.* (Also known as the Federal Water Pollution Control Act; and P.L. 92-500, as amended.)
(h) Coastal Barrier Resources Act of 1982, 16 U.S.C. § 3501 *et seq.*; 12 U.S.C. § 1441 *et seq.*
(i) Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended, P.L. 92-583; 16 U.S.C. 1451, *et seq.*
(j) Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, P.L. 93-205; 16 U.S.C. 1531, *et seq.*
(k) Estuary Protection Act, P.L. 90-454; 16 U.S.C. 1221, *et seq.*
(l) Federal Environmental Pesticide Control Act, P.L. 92-516; 7 U.S.C. 136.
(m) Federal Water Project Recreation Act, as amended, P.L. 89-72; 16 U.S.C. 460-1(12), *et seq.*
(n) Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act of 1958, as amended, P.L. 85-624; 16 U.S.C. 661, *et seq.*
(o) Historic Sites Act of 1935, as amended, P.L. 74-292; 16 U.S.C. 461, *et seq.*
(p) Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, P.L. 88-578; 16 U.S.C. 460/-460/-11, *et seq.*
(q) Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1928; 16 U.S.C. 715.
(r) Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918; 16 U.S.C. 703, *et seq.*
(s) National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, P.L. 91-190; 42 U.S.C. 4321, *et seq.*
(t) National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, P.L. 89-655; 16 U.S.C. 470a, *et seq.*
(u) Native American Religious Freedom Act, P.L. 95-341; 42 U.S.C. 1996, *et seq.*
(v) Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976, P.L. 94-580; 7 U.S.C. 1010, *et seq.*
(w) River and Harbor Act of 1899, 33 U.S.C. 403, *et seq.* (Also known as the Refuse Act of 1899.)
(x) Submerged Lands Act of 1953, P.L. 82-3167; 43 U.S.C. 1301, *et seq.*
(y) Surface Mining and Reclamation Act of 1977, P.L. 95-89; 30 U.S.C. 1201, *et seq.*
(z) Toxic Substances Control Act, P.L. 94-469; 15 U.S.C. 2601, *et seq.*
(aa) Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act, as amended, P.L. 83-566; 16 U.S.C. 1001, *et seq.*
(bb) Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, as amended, P.L. 90-542; 16 U.S.C. 1271, *et seq.*

2. EXECUTIVE ORDERS
(a) Executive Order 11593, Protection and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment. May 13, 1979 (36 FR 8921; May 15, 1971).

(b) Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management. May 24, 1977 (42 FR 26951; May 25, 1977).
(c) Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands. May 24, 1977 (42 FR 26961; May 25, 1977).
(d) Executive Order 11514, Protection and Enhancement of Environmental Quality, March 5, 1970, as amended by Executive Order, 11991, May 24, 1977.
(e) Executive Order 12088, Federal Compliance with Pollution Control Standards, October 13, 1978.
(f) Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs, July 14, 1982.
(g) Executive Order 12856, Federal Compliance with Right-to-Know Laws and Pollution Prevention Requirements, August 3, 1993.
(h) Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, February 11, 1994.
(i) Executive Order (EO) 13653 Preparing the US for the Impacts of Climate Change, November 1, 2013.

3. OTHER FEDERAL POLICIES
(a) Council on Environmental Quality Memorandum of August 11, 1980: Analysis of Impacts on Prime or Unique Agricultural Lands in Implementing the National Environmental Policy Act.
(b) Council on Environmental Quality Memorandum of August 10, 1980: Interagency Consultation to Avoid or Mitigate Adverse Effects on Rivers in the National Inventory.
(c) Migratory Bird Treaties and other international agreements listed in the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, Section 2(a)(4)

8 REQUEST FOR COMMENTS

Interested parties are encouraged to contact USACE - Buffalo District with their comments and recommendations regarding the Section 1135 Project Modifications for Improvement of the Environment study. Please review the study information and send your comments or recommendations in writing within thirty (30) days to the following e-mail address:

Scajaquada1135@usace.army.mil

or via mail to:

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Buffalo District
Environmental Analysis Team
478 Main Street
Buffalo, NY 14202-3278
ATTN: Environmental Analysis - Scajaquada 1135

9 REFERENCES

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