

# Using Dredged Material Best Practices and Nature to Create River Island Habitat in Coastal Louisiana, USA

Burton Suedel, Jacob Berkowitz,  
Sung-Chan Kim, Nathan Beane,  
Elizabeth Summers, Darrell Evans

USACE ERDC

Jeff Corbino and Maik Flanagin

USACE New Orleans District

WEDA 2015 Dredging Summit & Expo  
Houston, Texas



®

US Army Corps of Engineers  
**BUILDING STRONG®**



# ***What is Engineering with Nature?***

---

- USACE navigation program introduced EWN initiative in 2010
- Attempt to understand and deliberately work with natural processes to accomplish engineering goals
- Expands environmental, social, & economic benefits from USACE projects
- Focuses on collaboration and communication with a variety of stakeholders throughout the life of a project

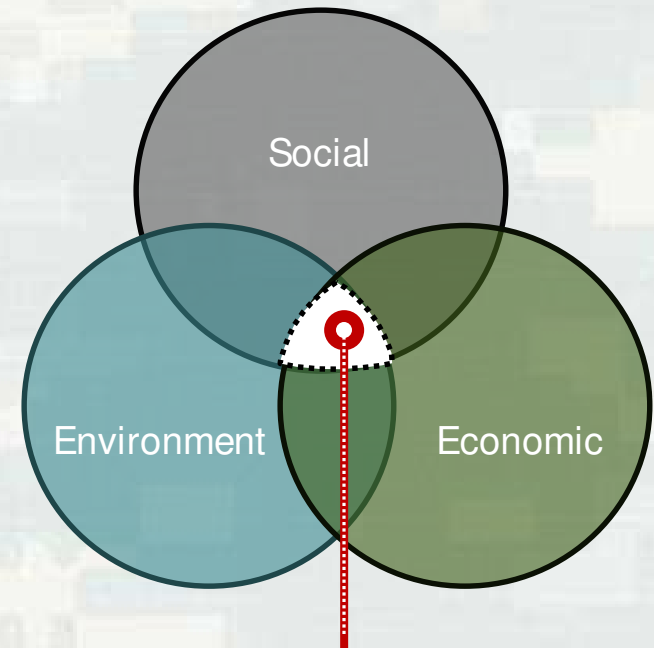


# ***What is the Intent of the EWN Initiative?***

---

- Improve resilience and sustainability of projects in coastal systems
- Identify and implement cost-effective, efficient engineering practices
- Realize “other” benefits for USACE projects
- Gain credibility and respect of stakeholders
- <http://el.erdc.usace.army.mil/ewn/>

## ***Project Benefits***



***the EWN Trifecta!***



**BUILDING STRONG®**



# ***USACE Case Study***

---

## **Atchafalaya River Federal Navigation Channel**

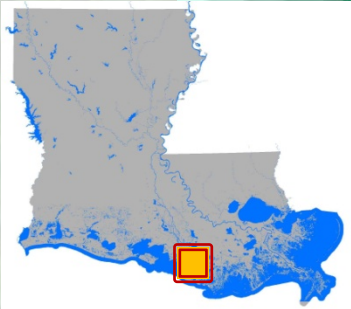
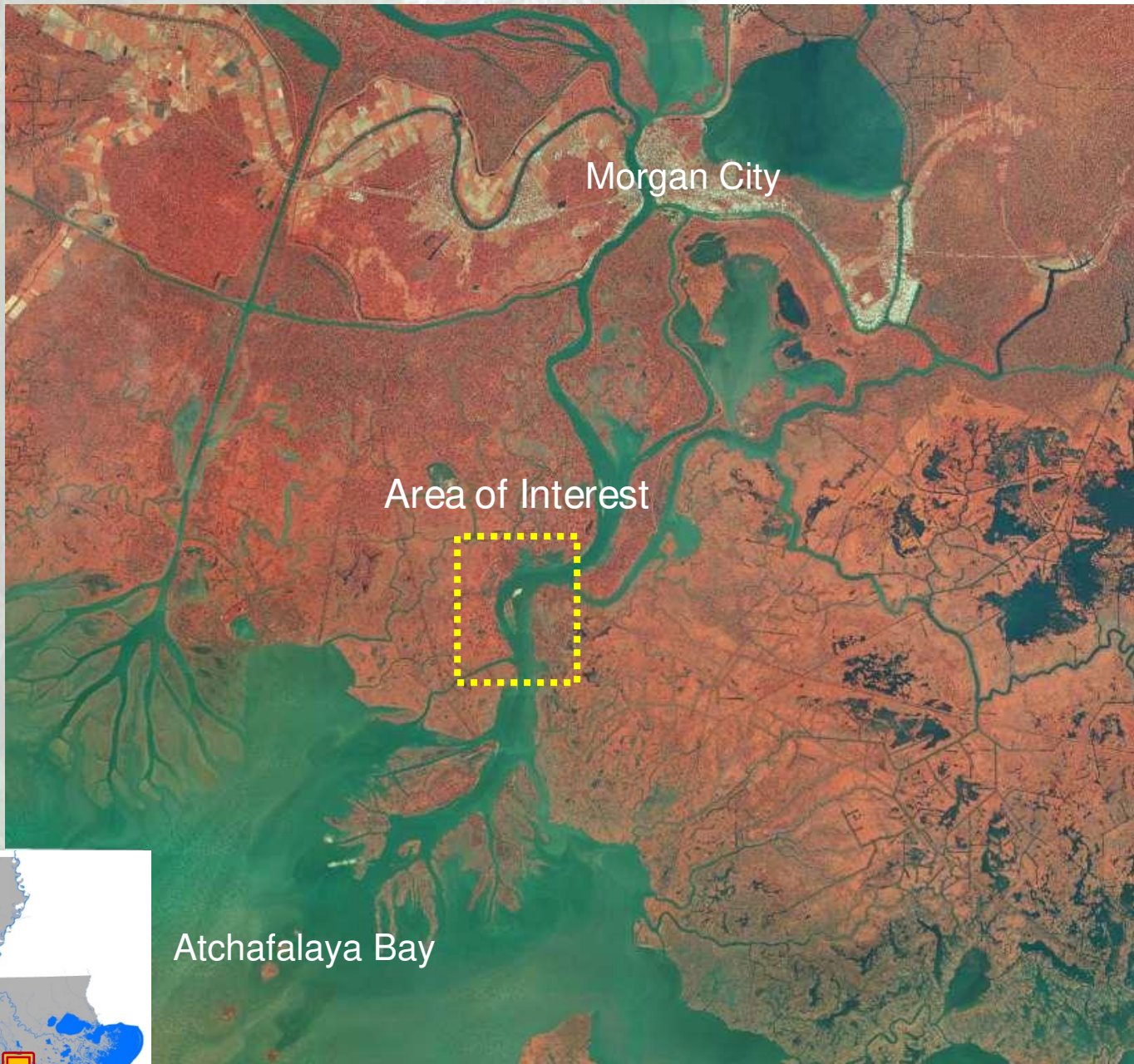
**Multiple Benefits Derived from a  
Novel Dredged Material Placement Practice  
at Horseshoe Bend**



---

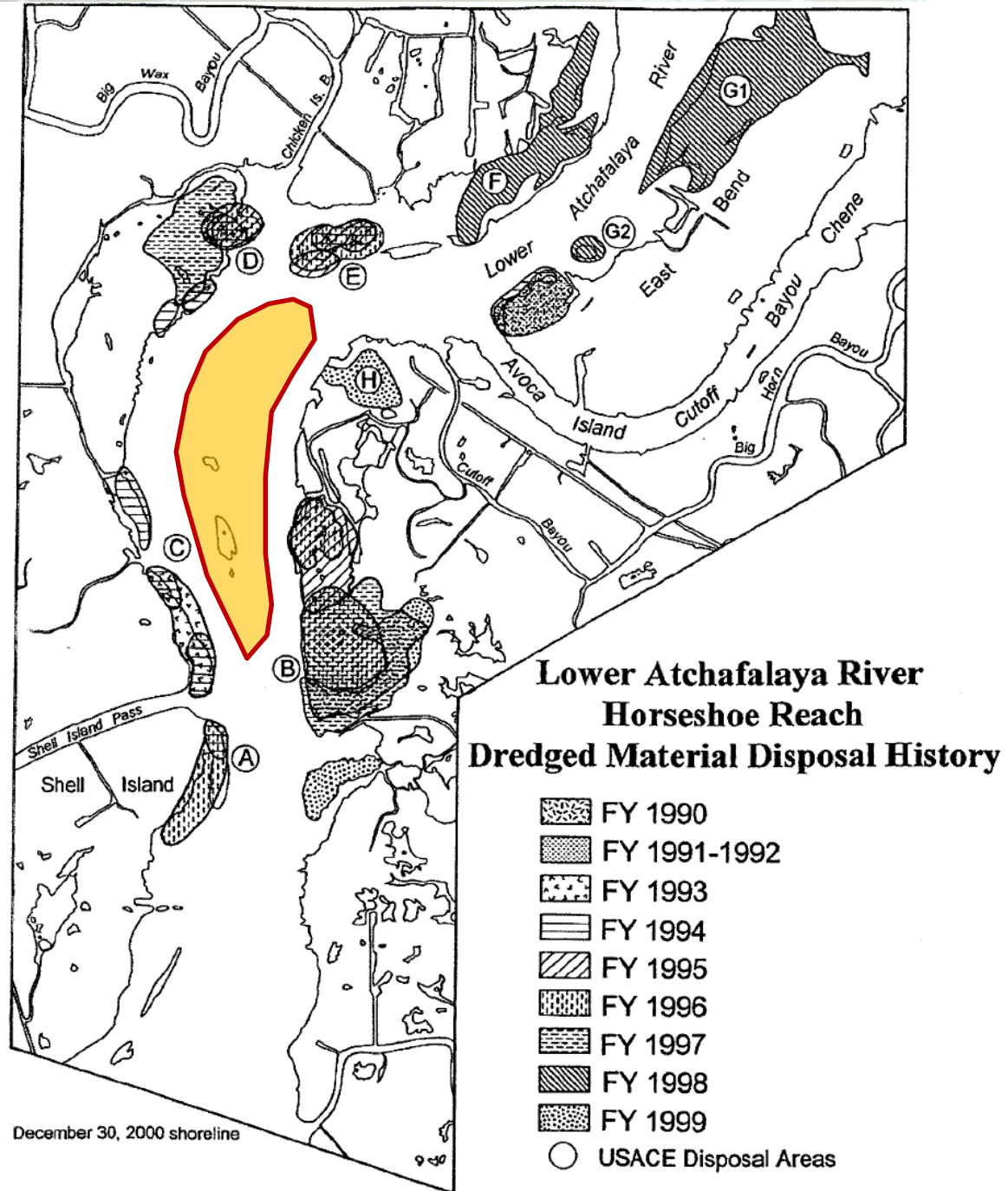
**BUILDING STRONG®**





**BUILDING STRONG®**





## Problem

Capacity of Bankline  
Disposal Areas Exhausted

## Alternatives

~~Conversion of Wetland  
Disposal Areas into Upland~~

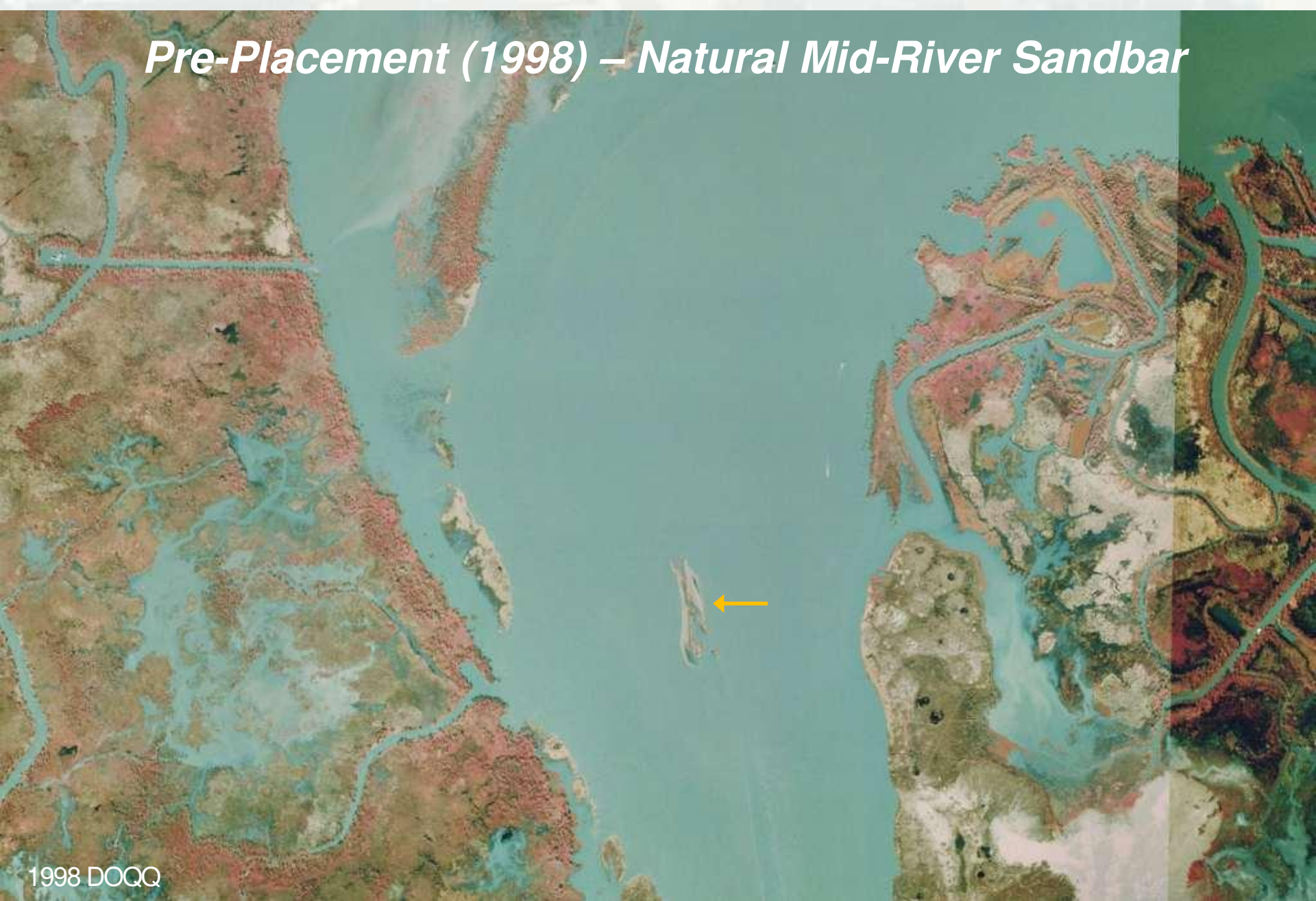
~~Open Water Disposal in  
Atchafalaya Bay~~

Mid-River Mounding of  
Dredged Material



**BUILDING STRONG®**

# *Pre-Placement (1998) – Natural Mid-River Sandbar*



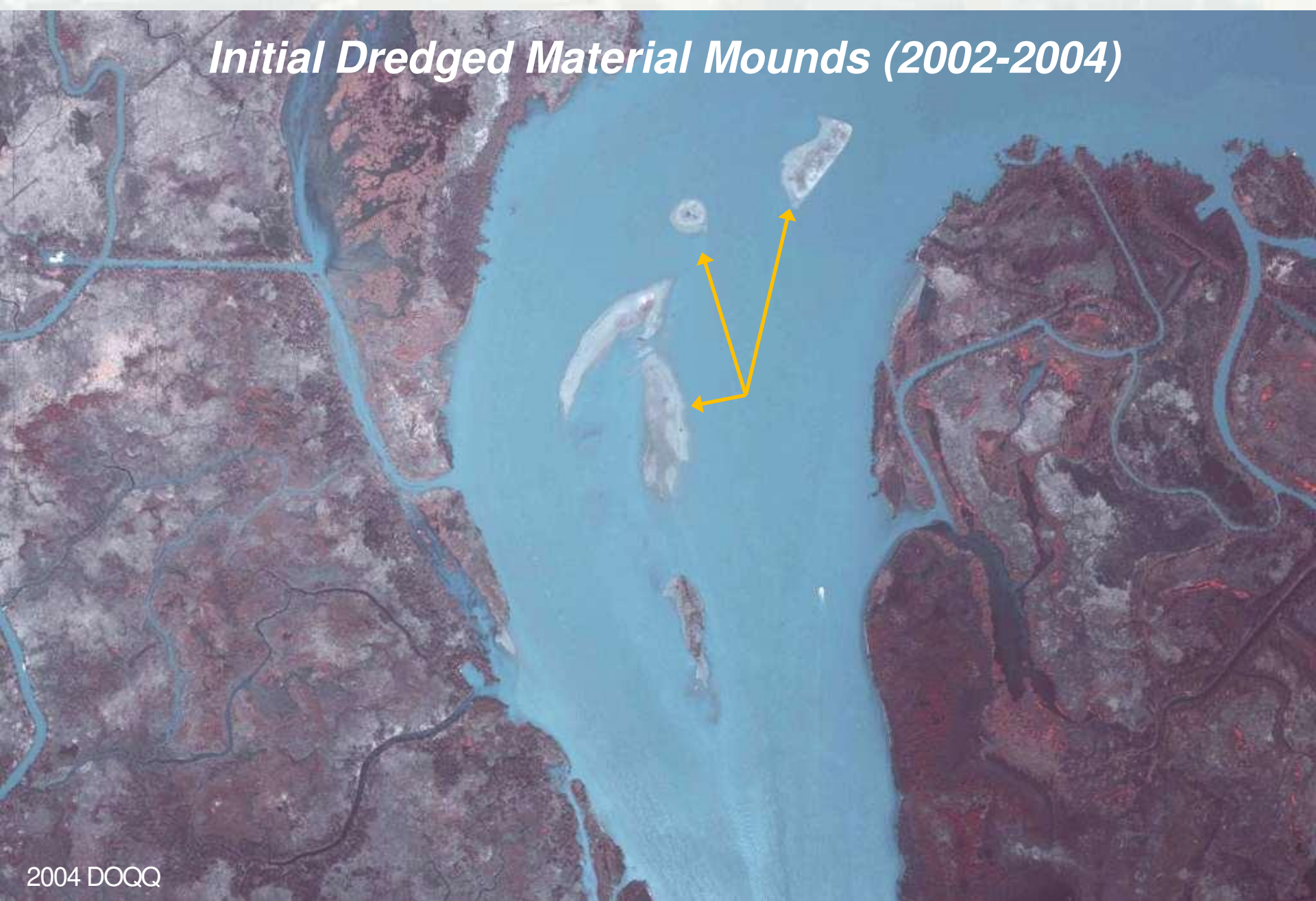
1998 DOQQ



**BUILDING STRONG®**



## *Initial Dredged Material Mounds (2002-2004)*



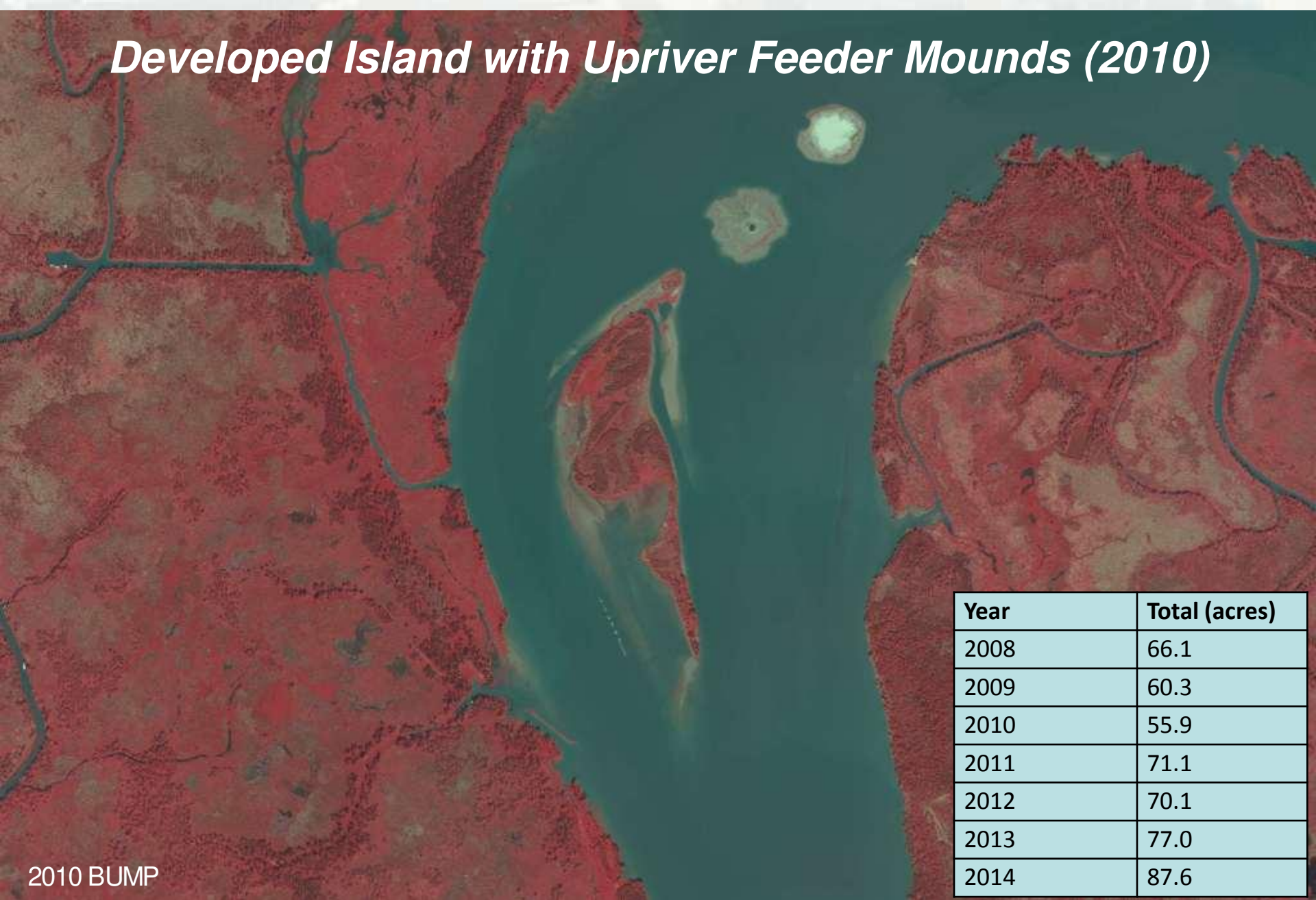
2004 DOQQ



**BUILDING STRONG®**



# *Developed Island with Upriver Feeder Mounds (2010)*



Year	Total (acres)
2008	66.1
2009	60.3
2010	55.9
2011	71.1
2012	70.1
2013	77.0
2014	87.6



**BUILDING STRONG®**

# *Quantification of the Environmental Benefit*

---

- Identify and Classify Distinct Habitat Types
- Catalogue Plants and Animals
- Evaluate Soil Horizons



**BUILDING STRONG®**



# Habitat Classification

Horseshoe Bend Dredged Material Island

Photo Area  
(at Right)



**BUILDING STRONG®**





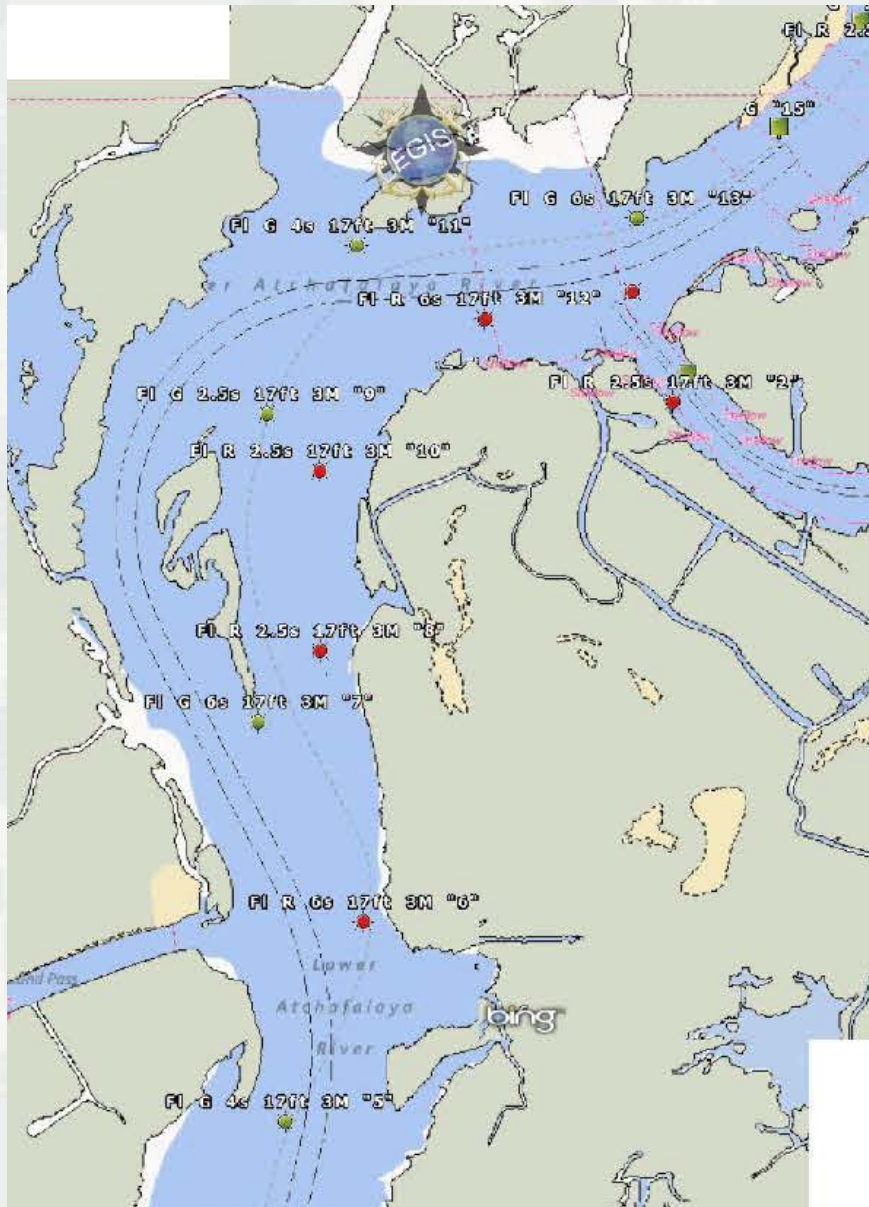
20" Soil Plugs Evaluated for  
Zonation, Color, Texture &  
Redox Features



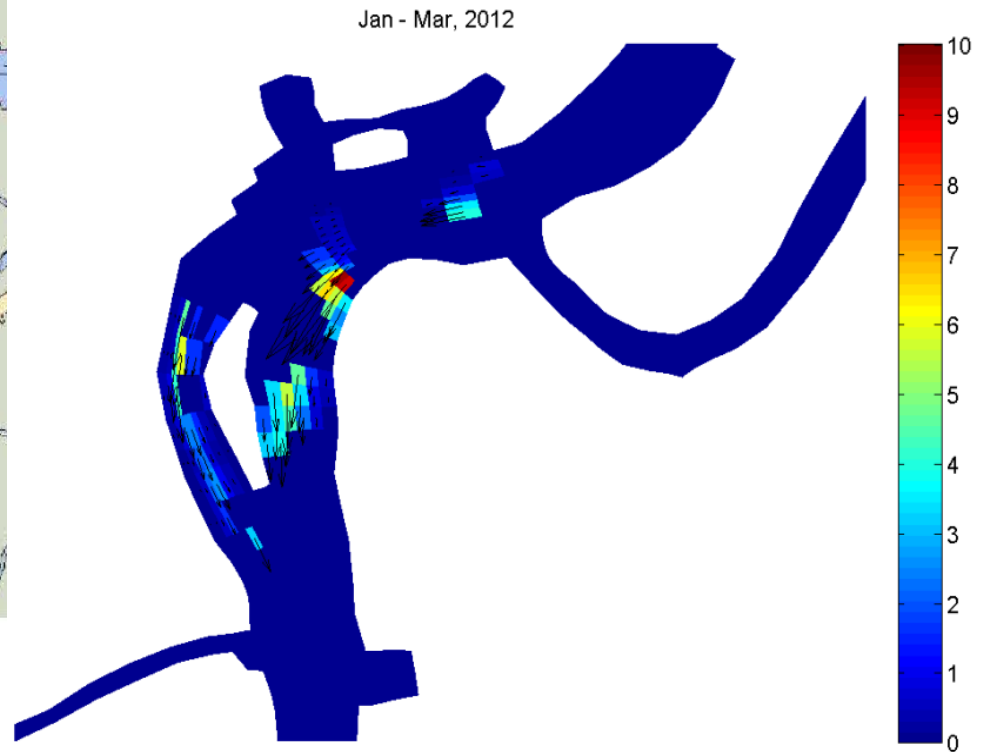
**BUILDING STRONG®**



# Navigation Benefit



*Modeling Hydrodynamics:*  
Mean suspended sediment  
transport volume rate  
during January - March  
2012 ( $\text{m}^3/\text{m}/\text{s}$ )



# ***What Have We Learned?***

---

- Four distinct wetland habitats within a small area (35 ha), supporting a larger than expected variety of plants and animals
- Over 80 plant species observed on island, compared to 53 plant species noted for natural wetlands along the lower river
- Soils are active, function to cycle nutrients and sequester carbon
- Allowing the island to “self-form” is key to creating comparatively improved wetland habitat relative to the two reference areas
- Benefits realized: environmental, economic, navigation, etc.





# ***What is Happening Now?***

---

- Document positive / negative channel maintenance impacts
- Identify and quantify benefits
- Communicate findings widely (publications, conferences, press releases)
- Seek other applications for this novel placement practice



**BUILDING STRONG®**

# Take Away Points

- Effective waterways management practices are being implemented as part of maintenance dredging projects
- Many such practices are relatively unknown/not widely disseminated or publicized
- Communication essential to promote these good practices
- Lessons learned so innovative approaches can be more broadly applied
- Utilize nature's energy

## Island Building in the Atchafalaya River, Louisiana USA An Engineering with Nature Demonstration Project

Burton C. Suedel<sup>1</sup>, Thomas J. Fredette<sup>2</sup>, and Jeffery M. Corbino<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> US Army Corps of Engineers, Engineer Research and Development Center, Vicksburg, MS USA

<sup>2</sup> US Army Corps of Engineers, Engineer Research and Development Center, Concord, MA USA

<sup>3</sup> US Army Corps of Engineers, New Orleans District, New Orleans, LA USA

### Introduction

Over the past several years, the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) New Orleans District has been using dredged material to nourish a small island that began forming naturally in the Atchafalaya River, Louisiana (LA). This effort has involved placing sediment dredged from a Federal navigation channel during routine maintenance in low relief mounds upriver of the island since 2002 (Figure 1). The mounded material has been dispersed by natural river currents to self-design the island. Prior to 2002, dredged material was being placed directly into shallow depressions along the river's banks to nourish existing wetlands, but continued placement into these areas was not sustainable because high quality wetlands would be converted into upland habitat.

Consequently, the alternative beneficial use to place material upstream of the small natural island was conceived. Until recently, only visual inspections have been conducted of the developing biological community on the island, thus benefits the island was creating remained largely unknown. As part of the Engineering With Nature initiative within the USACE, we have recently begun an investigation to use the island as a demonstration project to quantify the biological benefits and otherwise improve our understanding of the physical maturation of this beneficial use of dredged material within the Atchafalaya Basin.



Figure 1: December 2011 aerial infrared photograph of the Atchafalaya River island after multiple years of upstream mounding of dredged material. The island's formation has reduced the overall cross sectional area of the river, increasing river flow through the navigation channel to the east sufficient to reduce shoaling and maintenance dredging requirements.