

New Hampshire Dredge Management Task Force Meeting Minutes – April 14, 2021

The meeting was held virtually on Wednesday, April 14, 2021 from 10:00 AM to approximately 12:10 PM using the Microsoft Teams platform.

Participants (in alphabetical order):

Jean Brochi, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
John Brosnihan, Kittery Harbormaster
Steve Couture, NH Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) Coastal Program
Mark Cutter, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
Mike Dionne, New Hampshire Fish and Game Department (NHF&G)
Loretta Doughty, NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT)
Wendy Gendron, USACE
Stefanie Giallongo, NHDES Wetlands Bureau
Mark Habel, USACE
Richard Holt, Portsmouth Pilots
Aaron Hopkins, USACE
Chris Jacobs, Town of Hampton Department of Public Works
Michael Johnson, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)
Bill Kavanaugh, USACE
Richard Kristoff, USACE
Eben Lewis, NHDES Wetlands Bureau
Maureen Madray, Normandeau Associates, Inc.
Erika Mark, USACE
Melissa Paly, Conservation Law Foundation
Alex Pelczar, Senator Collins
Bonita Pothier, Senator King
Seth Prescott, NH Dept. of Natural & Cultural Resources, Division of Parks & Recreation
Todd Randall, ACOE
Jennifer Reczek, NHDOT
Chris Scott, Senator Shaheen
Coral Siligato, USACE
Mary Ann Tilton, NHDES Wetlands Bureau
Ted Trippi, Senator Shaheen
Justin Troiano, Senator Hassan
David Trubey, NH Division of Historical Resources
Mike Walsh, USACE
Chris Williams, Chair, NHDES Coastal Program
Phil Winslow, Town of Rye Board of Selectmen
Steve Wolf, EPA

Legislative Update:

Ted Trippi of Senator Shaheen's Office stated the Senator is closely following the proposed infrastructure package, the American Jobs Plan (Plan), proposed by the President. The Plan is said to include approximately \$17 billion for ports and waterways. The Senate is awaiting release of the text of the Plan. Mr. Trippi stated that once details of the Plan are released, he expects lengthy negotiations as the Senate debates how to pay for the Plan. He stated that he will keep the Task Force apprised as

details of the Plan emerge.

Mr. Trippi also acknowledged that the Portsmouth Harbor and Piscataqua River Navigation Improvement Project has been included in the Army Corps of Engineers' Fiscal Year 2021 Workplan. He stated that the Senator has been and continues to be a strong supporter of the project.

Justin Troiano of Senator Hassan's Office, Alex Pelczar of Senator Collins' Office, and Bonita Pothier of Senator King's Office acknowledged that they are all awaiting the release of the legislative text of the President's infrastructure bill.

Portsmouth Harbor/Piscataqua River Navigation Improvement Project:

Todd Randall of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) gave a presentation summarizing the current status of the Portsmouth Harbor and Piscataqua River Navigation Improvement Project (Project). The Project, which proposes to widen the existing turning basin located at the upstream end of the federal navigation channel in the Piscataqua River from 800 to 1,200 feet.

The USACE received Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) federal consistency concurrence for the Project from the states of New Hampshire and Maine in June 2014, and released a Final Feasibility Report and Final Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Project in July 2014. Since 2014, the USACE has been working to complete the pre-construction, engineering, and design phase of the Project and awaiting federal funding to begin Project construction. The USACE recently received federal funding, and as mentioned in the Legislative Update, the Project is included in the USACE's FY21 Workplan. As a result, the Project is scheduled to begin in the fall of 2021.

The majority of the aspects of construction of the Project and the forecasted impacts to coastal resources remain the same as described in the USACE's Final Feasibility Report and Final EA, and in the documentation provided to the states of New Hampshire and Maine in 2014, with the exception of the identified presence of eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) within the side slopes of the Project area. The presence of eelgrass within the Project area was first observed in 2016 during a USACE survey and subsequent surveys have confirmed its presence. Although the USACE has adjusted the alignment of the Project to avoid and minimize eelgrass impacts, approximately 39,200 square feet of eelgrass located in the Project side slopes will be impacted. In addition, as a result of the adjustments to the Project alignment, the total volume of glacial till/sand to be dredged has been reduced to approximately 684,000 cubic yards, while the volume of rock to be dredged has been reduced to approximately 15,000 cubic yards.

The USACE is proposing to compensate for the 39,200 square feet of eelgrass to be directly impacted by the Project, as well as provide an additional 1,960 square feet of eelgrass compensation for the temporal loss of eelgrass resources, by removing eelgrass from the Project site and transplanting it at one or more restoration sites located within the Piscataqua River estuary system. The USACE's eelgrass mitigation plan also includes monitoring and adaptive management of the mitigation site(s). The USACE plans to re-survey the Project area for eelgrass in the summer of 2021, prior to Project construction, to validate the forecasted amount of eelgrass present in the Project area and will adjust the compensation area accordingly. The USACE has submitted supplemental CZMA federal consistency determinations to both New Hampshire and Maine for the proposed eelgrass mitigation plan.

Erika Mark of the USACE stated that the majority of the material to be dredged will be used beneficially in Massachusetts. Some of the material will be pumped directly onto Nantasket Beach in Hull, and some of the material will be placed nearshore off Newbury and Salisbury. With regard to Project timing, she stated that the USACE anticipates releasing a solicitation in mid-June of this year, with mobilization beginning in October and construction beginning in mid-November.

Mike Johnson of the National Marine Fisheries Service commended the USACE for developing an eelgrass mitigation plan that involves eelgrass restoration, as opposed to using Maine's in-lieu fee program.

[Additional information about the Portsmouth Harbor and Piscataqua River Navigation Improvement Project, including the proposed Eelgrass Mitigation Plan.:](#)

Summary of 2020 Great Bay Estuary Eelgrass Restoration White Paper:

Melissa Paly, the Conservation Law Foundation's Great Bay – Piscataqua Water Keeper, gave a brief overview of the white paper titled *A Case for Restoration and Recovery of Zostera marina L. in the Great Bay Estuary, May 2020*. Development of the white paper was prompted by recent improvements in water quality resulting from upgrades to several wastewater treatment facilities in the Great Bay Estuary and new water quality-related regulations. A workgroup of eelgrass and water quality experts from the University of New Hampshire, the NH Department of Environmental Services, the Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership, the Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, and the Conservation Law Foundation (CLF) authored the white paper, which provides an assessment of the state of the science of eelgrass in the Great Bay Estuary and recommends next steps to consider when developing a long-term restoration and recovery plan. One of primary recommendations of the workgroup is to revisit the eelgrass site suitability model developed by Dr. Fred Short (*Site-selection Model for Optimal Transplantation of Eelgrass Zostera marina in the Northeastern US*) and update it with new data sets and geospatial information to determine the best sites for eelgrass restoration in the Great Bay Estuary. CLF has funded two researchers, one at UNH and one Boston University, to update Dr. Short's site suitability model. A report of their findings is being finalized. The report identifies areas within the Great Bay Estuary suitable for eelgrass restoration. Based on the findings of the report, a pilot-scale eelgrass transplantation effort is scheduled to begin this summer. Five restoration sites have been selected and two different eelgrass restoration methods will be implemented at each site. In coordination with the USACE, eelgrass will be harvested from areas to be disturbed as part of the Piscataqua River Navigation Improvement Project and transplanted at the five restoration sites.

Researchers and USACE staff will coordinate and share results of the site suitability analysis and the USACE's eelgrass mitigation plan (described above) to help ensure both efforts produce the best possible results to inform longer-term, large-scale eelgrass restoration efforts in the Great Bay Estuary.

[A copy of the eelgrass restoration white paper.](#)

Rye Harbor Maintenance Dredging:

Mike Walsh, ACOE Project Manager, stated that the maintenance dredging of Rye Harbor is complete. The USACE's contractor, Prock Marine, removed a total of 59,423 cubic yards of material from the harbor. Specifically, 51,033 cubic yards of material was removed from the federal channels and anchorages, and 8,390 cubic yards of material was removed from the state anchorage. He stated that due to the presence of ledge at the southeast corner of the 8-foot federal anchorage, the area couldn't be dredged to the authorized depth. All of the dredged material was placed at the recently designated Isles of Shoals North (IOSN) Disposal Site. Mr. Walsh thanked the EPA for its efforts to designate the IOSN Disposal Site prior to the start of project construction. He also stated that the haul route to and

from the IOSN Disposal Site, which was established to minimize impacts to fishing gear, worked well.

Phil Winslow, Town of Rye Board of Selectmen, thanked Mr. Walsh, Senator Shaheen and her staff, Leo Axtin - Rye Harbormaster, and Prock Marine for their efforts on all aspects of project design, funding and construction.

Chairman Williams asked about the status of the dredging around a private pier in the harbor. Rick Kristoff, USACE, stated that the area was successfully dredged and pilings that were encroaching into the federal anchorage were removed.

Piscataqua River Simplex Shoal Maintenance Dredging:

Mark Cutter, USACE Navigation Section Chief, stated that at a recent Maine Dredging Team meeting the Portsmouth Pilots made him aware of shoaling in the Piscataqua River in the vicinity of the Tyco Electronics Integrated Cable Systems facility. The area, historically known as the Simplex Shoal, is typically dredged approximately every ten years. It was last dredged in 2013 when 15,000 cubic yards of material was removed and placed in a deep “hole” downriver. At that time, advanced maintenance dredging was performed to reduce the frequency of dredging. Mr. Cutter stated that the USACE has expressed the capability to execute a contract and is now awaiting funding for the project.

Chairman Williams asked if the advanced maintenance dredging performed in 2013 was successful. Bill Kavanaugh, USACE Project Manager, confirmed that the advance maintenance dredging is indeed working. He stated that without advanced maintenance dredging, the area would require dredging much more frequently.

Dick Holt, Portsmouth Pilots, concurred that the advanced maintenance dredging is working. He stated that the area subject to advanced maintenance dredging in 2013 is holding up well. He also stated that the current sand wave shoal is in a slightly different location than the area that’s been dredged in the past.

Isles of Shoals Harbor of Refuge – Breakwaters Repair:

This Isles of Shoals Harbor of Refuge federal navigation project consists of three breakwaters between four of the islands that comprise the Isles of Shoals. Two of the breakwaters are located in Maine waters (Town of Kittery), while the third breakwater, between Star Island and Cedar Island, is located in both Maine and New Hampshire waters. The USACE has received funding to repair the three breakwaters.

Mark Habel, USACE, stated that the USACE first conducted site inspections of the breakwaters in July 2020 and has subsequently surveyed the breakwaters on several occasions. The USACE has determined that repair of the breakwaters needs to be done primarily from shore. As a result, stone access ramps will need to be built to land barges on to get equipment and stone onshore. Because this will involve work beyond the existing footprint of the breakwaters, the USACE has determined that an Environmental Assessment (EA) must be completed. The USACE has also surveyed the harbor in the lee of the three breakwaters and found scattered eelgrass behind the southern-most breakwater between Star Island and Cedar Island.

The USACE is currently in the process of securing real estate agreements to build the stone access ramps. This process will likely take a couple of months. The USACE has also begun drafting the EA and will be reaching out to the Rye and Kittery Harbormasters to lay out barge traffic fairways through the harbor to access each of the stone ramps to ensure mooring gear is not in way of tugs and barges bringing equipment and stone to the islands. Mr. Habel stated that USACE has determined that it is

unsafe to perform the work in winter and is proposing a construction window of April through October of 2022.

John Brosnihan, Kittery Harbormaster, asked if the USACE will provide notice of the proposed work that he can share with mooring owners. Mr. Habel stated that the USACE would provide notice of the proposed activity but would look to the Town to do outreach to mooring owners that are not also landowners. Mr. Brosnihan stated that the proposed work may require a waiver from the Kittery Port Authority.

Mike Johnson, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), asked if the USACE could provide a copy of the eelgrass survey, prior to requesting consultation with NMFS.

Hampton Harbor Jetty Repair:

Coral Siligato, USACE Project Manager, stated that the Hampton Harbor Federal Navigation Project includes both the north and south jetties at the inlet to Hampton Harbor. Both jetties were constructed in 1965. The south jetty was repaired in the mid-1970s and appears to be in good shape, however, the USACE will be assessing the condition of the south jetty later this month. The north jetty was repaired in 1981 and again in 2016. Storm events since 2016 have damaged the north jetty and it is in need of repair. The USACE have received \$4.5 million to complete the repairs to the north jetty. The USACE is currently in the early phases of project design and plans to begin an environmental assessment later this spring with repair work scheduled to begin in the late summer/early fall of 2022.

Based on the USACE's assessment of the north jetty, it is recommending that the stone size be increased to make the jetty more stable, less susceptible to storm damage, and reduce the frequency of repairs. Approximately 5,500 tons of existing small/undersized stone will need to be removed from the jetty to accommodate the larger stone. The USACE is looking at options for the re-use of the undersized stone and suggested that perhaps the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT), the Pease Development Authority Division of Ports and Harbors (PDA-DPH), or others may be able to make us of it.

Jennifer Reczek, NHDOT, stated that given the USACE's spring/summer 2022 construction timeline, it would be too early for NHDOT to use the material as part of the replacement of the Route 1A Bridge of Hampton Harbor, as construction isn't scheduled to begin until 2024.

Ms. Siligato inquired about options for stockpiling the rock. Chairman suggested Ms. Siligato contact PDA-DPH regarding stockpiling options.

Seth Prescott, NH Department of Natural and Cultural Resources – State Parks, suggested using the rock to supplement the existing rock that lines the northern side of the Hampton Harbor entrance channel, near the state's RV park.

Route 1A Hampton Harbor Bridge Replacement Project:

Jennifer Reczek, NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) Project Manager, gave an update on the proposal to replace the Neil R. Underwood Bridge (Route 1A), which spans the Hampton River at the inlet to Hampton Harbor. Ms. Reczek previously updated the Task Force on the status of the project at the February 6, 2019 Task Force meeting. She reminded members that the bridge is #1 on the state's red list of state-owned bridges because it is structurally deficient and functionally obsolete. NHDOT evaluated five alternatives and ultimately identified replacement of the existing bridge with a high-level fixed bridge as the preferred alternative. This alternative

accommodates all existing users of the harbor. The preferred alignment of the new bridge will be west of the existing bridge. The proposed bridge will increase the vertical clearance above the channel to 48 feet. Currently, the existing bridge when closed has a vertical clearance above the channel at mean high water of 20 feet. Under the preferred alternative, the distance between the bridge piers will be widened such that the width of the navigation channel will be increased to 150 feet. NHDOT does not anticipate any impacts to the navigation channel.

The next steps in project development include, in part, continued coordination with multiple state and federal agencies regarding natural, cultural and recreational resources. After NHDOT has selected a final alternative, it will move forward with project construction, which is expected to begin in 2024 and last approximately 36-months.

For additional information about the project, visit [NHDOT's Project Specific Information web page](#).

Hampton Harbor Hydrodynamic Feasibility Study Federal Interest Determination:

The USACE has recently received \$50K under its Section 107 (Small Harbors) Program to develop a federal interest determination (FID) regarding Hampton Harbor. The FID is essentially the USACE's assessment of whether it makes economic sense to invest federal dollars in a hydrodynamic feasibility study to determine what's causing the recurring shoaling in Hampton Harbor and how to alleviate it, or to continue to dredge the harbor every 5-7 years.

Mark Habel, USACE, stated that due to staffing issues work in the FID won't begin until the end of this fiscal year in September. Completion of the FID is anticipated in the spring or summer of 2022. If the USACE determines that it's favorable to move forward with a hydrodynamic feasibility study of the harbor, the USACE will use any remaining money to scope the feasibility study. The USACE will then execute a cost sharing agreement with the state sponsor, likely the Pease Development Authority Division of Ports and Harbors. The USACE is hopeful that it can utilize data/information/models already developed for the Harbor by the University of New Hampshire and others to help reduce the cost of the feasibility study.

Other Business:

The next meeting was tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, September 22, 2021 at 10am.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 12:10pm.