

New Hampshire Dredge Management Task Force Meeting Minutes – February 2, 2022

The meeting was held virtually using the Microsoft Teams platform.

Participants (in alphabetical order):

Ken Anderson, Riverside and Pickering Marine Contractors
Leo Axtin, Rye Harbor Master
Robert Boeri, Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management
Jean Brochi, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
John Brosnihan, Kittery Harbor Master
Meredith Collins, NH Department of Natural and Cultural Resources – State Parks
Mike Dionne, New Hampshire Fish and Game Department
Loretta Doughty, NH Department of Transportation
Alexis Freeman, Senator Hassan
Wendy Gendron, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
Mark Habel, USACE
Jennifer Hale, Town of Hampton
Alex Holderith, Senator Collins
Kerry Holmes, Senator Hassan
Dick Holt, Portsmouth Pilots/Moran Tug
Aaron Hopkins, USACE
Mike Johnson, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)
Bill Kavanaugh, USACE
Eben Lewis, NHDES Wetlands Bureau
Joseph Mackay, USACE
Jordan Macy, USACE
Erika Mark, USACE
Trevor Mattera, Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership
Duncan Mellor, Civilworks New England
Matthew Mroccka, USACE
Melissa Paly, Conservation Law Foundation
Bonita Pothier, Senator King
Seth Prescott, NH Department of Natural and Cultural Resources – State Parks
Todd Randall, USACE
Kristine Reed, USACE
Chris Scott, Senator Shaheen
Kaitlyn Shaw, NMFS
Coral Siligato, USACE
Alexa Sterling, EPA
Jenifer Thalhauser, USACE
James Tilley, NHDES Water Quality Certification Program
Ted Trippi, Senator Shaheen
David Trubey, NH Division of Historical Resources
Christopher Veinotte, USACE
Chris Williams, Chair, NHDES Coastal Program
Steve Wolf, EPA

Announcements:

Chairman Williams informed Task Force members that long-time members Carol Henderson of the NH Fish and Game Department (NHF&G) and Mike Walsh of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) had recently retired. He thanked Ms. Henderson and Mr. Walsh for their participation in the Task Force and wished them well in retirement.

Steve Wolf of EPA introduced Alexis Sterling to Task Force members. Ms. Sterling was recently hired by EPA and will be involved in dredging and dredge material management issues.

Legislative Update:

Ted Trippi of Senator Shaheen's Office in Washington stated the Senator is closely following the development of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). Based, in part, on discussions with the Pease Development Authority Division of Ports and Harbors (PDA-DPH), the Senator put forth two projects in NH's seacoast for inclusion in WRDA. The first is the Piscataqua River Simplex Shoal maintenance dredging project and the second is the Sagamore Creek maintenance dredging project. Funding for the Simplex Shoal project was included in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the project has been included in the USACE's work plan. The Sagamore Creek project, which was last dredged in 2017, is experiencing shoaling and the Senator requested that the USACE use its existing authorities to dredge those portions of Sagamore Creek that weren't dredged in 2017.

Chris Scott of Senator Shaheen's Office mentioned that both Senator Shaheen and Senator Hassan visited with staff from the PDA-DPH earlier in the week to receive updates on the status of the Piscataqua River Federal Navigation Improvement Project, which is currently underway.

Kerry Holmes of Senator Hassan's Office stated that she had nothing to add to what was presented by Mr. Trippi and Mr. Scott.

Bonnie Pothier of Senator King's Office stated that the Senator is closely following the WRDA bill and is very interested in the progress of the Piscataqua River Federal Navigation Improvement Project.

Jenifer Thalhauser of the USACE stated that the USACE received more than \$100 million in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act for operations and maintenance projects. Given that the USACE's normal operations and maintenance budget is approximately \$10 million, the USACE has a lot of work to do to create a project schedule and ensure that resources are available so that projects can be implemented.

Portsmouth Harbor/Piscataqua River Federal Navigation Improvement Project:

The Portsmouth Harbor and Piscataqua River Federal Navigation Improvement Project 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 total volume of glacial till/sand to be dredged is approximately 540,000 cubic yards, while the volume of rock to be dredged is approximately 15,000 cubic yards. Dredging began in November 2021.

Erika Mark, USACE Project Manager, stated that to date the contractor has dredged approximately 242,000 cubic yards of material. The majority of the dredged material has been deposited at the Isles of Shoals North offshore dredge material disposal site, while the remaining dredged material has been

placed nearshore off Newbury and Salisbury, Massachusetts. Blasting will be required to remove the ±15,000 cubic yards of rock. Test blasting is scheduled to begin today.

Chairman Williams asked Ms. Mark if there were any issues associated with the haul routes to the offshore and nearshore disposal sites and inquired about the status of the nearshore placement in Massachusetts.

Ms. Mark stated that the haul routes seem to be working effectively and she is unaware of any issues to date with conflicts with fishing equipment. She then stated that nearshore placement has been challenging due to weather, tides, and the contractor's large equipment accessing the shallow nearshore sites.

Todd Randall, USACE, then reminded members that the Project will impact just under an acre (approximately 39,200 square feet) of eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) located in the Project side slopes. Last summer, in an effort to mitigate for the loss of eelgrass, the USACE harvested eelgrass from the Project site and transplanted it at three sites within the Piscataqua River estuary. Plots containing approximately 500 eelgrass plants were established at the three sites beginning in mid-June. The test plots were monitored several times during the summer. Unfortunately, none of the transplanted eelgrass at the three test sites survived. A similar eelgrass restoration effort last summer in the Great Bay and Piscataqua River estuaries led by a team from the University of New Hampshire (UNH), the Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership (PREP), and the Conservation Law Foundation (CLF) produced results similar to that of the USACE's.

Mr. Randall stated that the USACE is committed to providing eelgrass mitigation. To that end, during the fall and winter the USACE has been meeting internally to decide how to proceed with eelgrass mitigation as well as discussing next steps with the UNH/PREP/CLF team. The mitigation plan will likely involve another round of test plots but perhaps with different methodologies and in different locations. He stated that at this point, the USACE is still pursuing in-kind mitigation. He then stated that he hopes to convene a meeting in the next 4-6 weeks with state and federal resource agencies and the UNH/PREP/CLF team to discuss options for this coming summer.

Mike Johnson, National Marine Fisheries Service, asked if the USACE has identified another eelgrass donor bed to provide plants for the upcoming summer test plots. Mr. Randall stated that the USACE has not yet identified another eelgrass donor bed but will work with the UNH/PREP/CLF team to do so.

Melissa Paly, CLF, confirmed that the UNH/PREP/CLF team's eelgrass restoration efforts last summer were unsuccessful. She stated that the team continues to explore ideas for pilot scale transplantation this summer and is looking forward to coordinating with USACE.

Chairman Williams then asked Bob Boeri, Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management, about the nearshore disposal efforts in Newbury and Salisbury, MA.

Mr. Boeri stated that the nearshore disposal seems to be going well at the Newbury site and he's working with the USACE to make sure the agreed upon disposal amount is placed at the Salisbury site.

Piscataqua River Simplex Shoal Maintenance Dredging:

Bill Kavanaugh, USACE Project Manager, stated that the Simplex Reach is located just downriver of the head of the federal navigation project where dredging is currently taking place. He stated that shoaling, in the form of sand waves, is currently occurring in the Simplex Reach. He stated that the Simplex Reach is the only place that shoals in the federal navigation channel. It is located at a nodal point in the river where material is deposited between flood and ebb tides. The shoaling is a safety issue for the vessels servicing the terminals along the river and draft restrictions are currently in place for vessels to navigate over the shoals. Mr. Kavanaugh stated that the Simplex Reach was last dredged in 2013. At that time approximately 15,000 cubic yards of sand was dredged and placed in a previously used in-river disposal site located downriver in Maine waters. The USACE is proposing advanced maintenance dredging to extend the frequency of dredging.

Mr. Kavanaugh confirmed, as previously mentioned by Mr. Trippi, that the project did receive funding under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). He stated that the funding amount is \$1.685 million. USACE Headquarters is working on distribution of the IIJA funds. Mr. Kavanaugh stated that the project will require CZMA federal consistency decisions from both New Hampshire and Maine and require a 401 Water Quality Certification from Maine for the proposed in-river disposal. The USACE anticipates work occurring in the fall of 2023.

John Brosnihan, Kittery Harbor Master, asked where the in-river disposal site is located in relation to the I-95 bridge. Mr. Kavanaugh stated that the disposal site is located upriver of the I-95 bridge in Eliot where the river begins to widen.

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, while the third breakwater, between Star Island and Cedar Island, is located in both Maine and New Hampshire waters. The Star Island-Cedar Island breakwater was last repaired in 1974.

Mark Habel, USACE, stated that the USACE is in the process of finalizing the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project. The USACE has completed coordination with federal agencies and the state of New Hampshire and hopes to have coordination completed with the state of Maine by mid-February. Once coordination is complete, the USACE will finalize the EA and then begin negotiations with landowners for easements. Once the easements have been negotiated, the USACE will finalize plans and specifications and then advertise the project for bids. The USACE has sufficient funding to complete the EA and plans and specifications, and construct the project. Mr. Habel stated that due to the dangers of working at the site during the winter, the construction window will begin April 1 and end November 30. It may take two seasons to complete construction.

Chairman Williams asked about the status of coordination with the Towns of Rye and Kittery.

Mr. Habel stated that once the EA is complete, the USACE will reach out to the harbor masters of both Rye and Kittery and to users of the harbor to determine the locations of fairways through the harbor for delivery of equipment and stone.

Mike Johnson, NMFS, asked for an update on potential eelgrass impacts from the project.

Todd Randall, USACE, confirmed the presence of eelgrass on the lee side of the Star Island-Cedar Island breakwater. He stated that the USACE has developed a Damage Assessment and Mitigation Plan for eelgrass should impacts to eelgrass occur. At this point the USACE is unsure if eelgrass impacts will occur because the exact construction methods have not yet been defined. The USACE is proposing temporary stone ramps to allow equipment and materials to be delivered to the breakwaters with construction occurring from atop the breakwaters. However, because of safety issues, access to the center of the Star-Cedar Island breakwater may occur from the water. If so, jack-up barges will be utilized and minor impacts to eelgrass may occur. Prior to construction, an eelgrass survey will be conducted.

Hampton Harbor Jetty Repair:

This project involves the repair of the north jetty at the inlet to Hampton Harbor to restore its functionality. The jetty was constructed in 1965 and last repaired in 2016. Storm events and a vessel strike since 2016 have damaged the north jetty and it is again in need of repair. The USACE have received \$4.5 million to complete the repairs to the north jetty. 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.

Coral Siligato, USACE Project Manager, stated that the USACE is working on project design. It is likely that the design will incorporate larger armor stone. The current jetty is constructed of both 4--6- and 6--10-ton stone. The USACE is proposing to increase the stone size to 6--10-ton stone throughout the structure including the underlayer stone. Ms. Siligato had mentioned at the last Task Force meeting that approximately 5,500 tons of existing small/undersized stone will need to be removed from the jetty to accommodate the larger stone. The USACE has now decided to incorporate this stone into the structure. Mr. Siligato stated that the USACE is currently working on environmental coordination and real estate agreements. The USACE is proposing to use portions of the Hampton Beach State Park parking lot for staging and storage. Marine-based work is anticipated to begin in August while land-based work is scheduled to begin in September, in part, to avoid impacts to piping plovers. The USACE hopes that work will be completed by November.

Chairman Williams asked whether the USACE is anticipating any use restrictions of the channel due to the presence of equipment.

Ms. Siligato stated that she didn't anticipate any restrictions. The equipment will be positioned outside the federal channel in close proximity to the jetty.

Hampton Harbor Hydrodynamic Feasibility Study Federal Interest Determination:

The USACE has received \$50K under its Section 107 (Small Harbors) Program to develop a federal interest determination (FID) regarding Hampton Harbor. The FID is 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. If the USACE determines that it's favorable to move forward with a hydrodynamic feasibility study of the harbor, the USACE will then execute a cost sharing agreement with the state sponsor, likely the Pease Development Authority Division of Ports and Harbors.

Jordan Macy, USACE Project Manager, stated that the FID began in mid-to-late November and is ongoing. There is a team at the USACE working on it. Results are expected this spring.

Chairman Williams stated that he's heard that shoaling is again occurring in the harbor. He asked if the USACE could confirm this.

Mr. Macy stated that the USACE has met with representatives of the Yankee Fishermen's Coop on the Seabrook side of the harbor and they have indicated that new shoaling is beginning to impact their operations.

Other Business: None

Next meeting: May 25, 2022

Meeting adjourned at approximately 11:15am