

New Hampshire Dredge Management Task Force Meeting Minutes – May 25, 2022

**The meeting was held in-person at the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services
Portsmouth Office, 222 International Drive, Suite 175, Portsmouth, NH.**

Participants (in alphabetical order):

Leo Axtin, Rye Harbor Master
Jean Brochi, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
Mike Dionne, New Hampshire Fish and Game Department
Mark Habel, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
Jennifer Hale, Department of Public Works, Town of Hampton
Dick Holt, Portsmouth Pilots/Moran Tug
Aaron Hopkins, USACE
Eben Lewis, NHDES Wetlands Bureau
Jay Mackay, USACE
Erika Mark, USACE
Trevor Mattera, Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership
Grace Moses, USACE
Melissa Paly, Conservation Law Foundation
Alex Pelczar, Senator Collins
Bonita Pothier, Senator King
Seth Prescott, NH Department of Natural and Cultural Resources – State Parks
Jennifer Reczek, NH Department of Transportation
Chris Scott, Senator Shaheen
Tracy Shattuck, PDA-DPH
Kaitlyn Shaw, National Marine Fisheries Service
Coral Siligato, USACE
Alexa Sterling, EPA
Mary Ann Tilton, NHDES Wetlands Bureau
Ted Trippi, Senator Shaheen
Justin Troiano, Senator Hassan
David Trubey, NH Division of Historical Resources
Chris Williams, Chair, NHDES Coastal Program
Phil Winslow, Board of Selectmen, Town of Rye
Steve Wolf, EPA

Legislative Update:

Ted Trippi of Senator Shaheen's Office in Washington stated that the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee marked-up the 2022 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) bill in early May. It is anticipated that the full Senate will take up WRDA in June. The marked-up bill includes a number of Senator Shaheen's priorities including expediting the maintenance dredging of the Simplex Shoal in the Piscataqua River and expediting the dredging of those areas in Sagamore Creek that weren't dredged in 2017. The bill also contains a number of other national priorities, including resilience projects and workforce development measures.

Justin Troiano of Senator Hassan's Office stated that a draft version of the Coastal Zone Management Act reauthorization will be released soon and encouraged members to contact the Senator's office with input on the Act once it is released.

Bonnie Pothier of Senator King's Office had nothing additional to add.

Alex Pelczar of Senator Collins' Office stated that finalizing WRDA 2022 in June is a priority for the Senate.

Portsmouth Harbor/Piscataqua River Federal Navigation Improvement Project:

Erika Mark, USACE Project Manager, stated that the Portsmouth Harbor and Piscataqua River Federal Navigation Improvement Project, which widened the existing turning basin located at the upstream end of the federal navigation channel in the Piscataqua River from 800 to 1,200 feet, was completed in mid-April. Approximately 572,000 cubic yards of material was removed. She stated that the post-dredge survey indicates that one high spot remains within the dredging footprint. Photos of the high spot indicate that it is rock that was not identified in the pre-dredge survey. The Coast Guard has/will be marking the spot as a high spot. The USACE intends to try to remove the rock as part of the future Simplex Shoal maintenance dredging project.

Chairman asked whether there were any issues with the haul routes identified to minimize impacts to fishermen and their fishing gear. Ms. Mark stated that there was some damage to fishing equipment and to a buoy but to her knowledge the issues were resolved by the contractor.

Ms. Mark also stated that there were two "short dumps" (dredged material disposed of in the wrong location). Steve Wolf, EPA, stated that there was a short dump on March 20th at the Isles of Shoals North Disposal Site. The short dump was due to operator error and material was disposed of several hundred feet from the approved disposal site in an area of hard bottom. Aaron Hopkins, USACE, stated that the contractor surveyed the area but was unable to locate the site of the short dump. The USACE Disposal Area Monitoring System (DAMOS) program likely to survey the Isles of Shoal North disposal site this summer and will try to identify the area of short dump. The USACE will share its findings with EPA. Mr. Wolf also stated that there was a short dump at the Newbury nearshore site.

Chairman then asked for an update on the nearshore disposal in Massachusetts. Ms. Mark stated that the USACE had hoped to place approximately 150,000 cubic yards of material at a nearshore site in Newbury, MA and another 150,000 cubic yards at a nearshore site in Salisbury, MA. Approximately 120,000 cubic yards was placed at the Newbury site while only 12,000 cubic yards was placed at the Salisbury site due to challenges posed by the size of the contractor's equipment and shallow water depths.

Ms. Mark then reminded members that last summer, in an effort to mitigate for the loss of eelgrass from the project, the USACE harvested eelgrass from the project site and transplanted it at three test sites within the Piscataqua River estuary. None of the transplanted eelgrass at the three test sites survived. Todd Randall of the USACE has been working with eelgrass experts from the University of New Hampshire, the Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership, and the Conservation Law Foundation to develop a new eelgrass transplanting plan. This summer the USACE intends to create eelgrass test plots at Fishing Island using a different methodology that was used last summer. The new methodology will use low-rise planting discs. The USACE also intends to perform more frequent maintenance of the test plots to help minimize macro-algae growth. If the test plots are successful, the USACE will finalize a mitigation plan.

Trevor Mattera of the Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership stated that it may be difficult to find a suitable eelgrass donor bed for transplanting.

Piscataqua River Simplex Shoal Maintenance Dredging:

There was no one from the USACE in attendance to provide an overview of the Piscataqua River Simplex Shoal maintenance dredging project.

Chairman Williams reminded members that approximately every 10 years shoaling in the form of sand waves develops in an area known as the Simplex Reach on the New Hampshire side of the Piscataqua River. Historically, the sand dredged from the Simplex Reach is placed in an in-river disposal site located downriver in Maine waters. The Simplex Reach was last dredged in 2013. Shoaling at the Simplex Reach 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.

Chairman Williams stated that the USACE is proposing advanced maintenance dredging to extend the frequency of dredging. He reminded members that the project received funding in the amount of \$1.685 million under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The USACE intends to advertise the project in September 2023.

Dick Holt, Portsmouth Pilots, asked when project construction would likely begin. Mark Habel, USACE, stated that if the project is advertised in September 2023, a contract would likely be awarded by December 2023, and work could begin in early 2024 (January – March).

Hampton Harbor Jetty Repair:

The project involves the repair of approximately 465 linear feet 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.

Coral Siligato, USACE Project Manager, stated that repairs will be made using 8,000 tons of new 6-10 ton armor stone as well as new underlayer stone. Plans and specifications are currently being reviewed internally at the USACE. Environmental coordination is complete and the Environmental Assessment will be finalized soon. Real estate coordination with the Pease Development Authority and NH State Park is nearly complete as well. The USACE's work plan was recently released and it includes \$1.2 million for the project. This is in addition to the \$4.5 million the USACE has already received. The USACE released a 15-day pre-solicitation notice on May 19th and anticipates issuing a solicitation seeking bids on/around June 3rd. If all goes well, the USACE hopes to award a contract in early August.

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. The USACE estimates that it may take up to four months to complete the project depending on the contractor.

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 the Environmental Assessment is complete and awaiting signature. Once signed, the USACE can begin negotiations with landowners regarding temporary easements for construction access and staging. Mr. Habel stated that the USACE currently cannot show clear title to Cedar Island. Without a clear title, the USACE can't execute an easement. As a result, the USACE may have to terminate construction of the Star Island-Cedar Island breakwater at the mean high water elevation on the southwest side of Cedar Island. This would mean that the last ±30 linear feet of the breakwater from mean high water to an elevation of 5.5 feet would not be repaired because the USACE can't encroach shoreward of mean high water with securing easements.

Chair asked how the title issue would affect the timing of project construction. Mr. Habel stated the USACE anticipates issuing plans and specifications this summer and awarding a contract in the fall. Given this timeframe, project construction would begin in April 2023. Due to the dangers of working at the site during the winter, the construction window will begin April 1 and end November 30.

Phil Winslow, Town of Rye Board of Selectmen, asked what port would be used for delivery of equipment and supplies to the Isles of Shoals and what municipality would be relied upon for medical and law enforcement support. Mr. Habel stated that these issues are the responsibility of the contractor. He stated that the contractor typically develops a safety plan and coordinates with the local municipality.

Mr. Habel then stated that the USACE will be reaching 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.

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.

Mark Habel, USACE, stated that the FID is complete. The draft FID has been submitted to the USACE's Division Office in New York for review and approval. Once the FID is approved it will be provided to the Pease Development Authority Division of Ports and Harbors (PDA-DPH) and the Towns of Hampton and Seabrook. The USACE will then conduct a scoping exercise, which will, in part, involve reaching out to the University of New Hampshire and others regarding hydrodynamic modeling, and develop a cost estimate for the feasibility study. The USACE will then coordinate with PDA-DPH to execute a cost sharing agreement to share feasibility study costs 50/50.

Replacement of the Route 1A Bridge over Hampton Harbor:

Jennifer Reczek, Project Manager, New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT), gave a presentation summarizing the status of the proposed replacement of the Route 1A Bridge over Hampton Harbor. Her presentation is attached.

Other Business:

Phil Winslow, Town of Rye Board of Selectmen, asked about the status of the replacement of the Route 1B Bridge over Little Harbor in Rye/New Castle. Ms. Reczek, NHDOT, stated that NHDOT is working with the U.S. Coast Guard regarding design alternatives (e.g., fixed vs. bascule). Chairman stated that this project may be suitable for discussion at the fall Dredge Management Task Force meeting.

Next meeting: October 12, 2022

Meeting adjourned at approximately 11:10am