New Hampshire Dredge Management Task Force
Meeting Minutes – March 1, 2023

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):

Mike Dionne, New Hampshire Fish and Game Department (NHF&G)
Jennifer Hale, Department of Public Works, Town of Hampton
Aaron Hopkins, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
Rick Kristoff, USACE
Cheri Patterson, NHF&G
Seth Prescott, DNCR – State Parks
Todd Randall, USACE
Chris Scott, Senator Shaheen
Tracy Shattuck, Pease Development Authority – Division of Ports & Harbors (PDA-DPH)
Kaitlyn Shaw, National Marine Fisheries Service
Alexa Sterling, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
Jennifer Thalhauser, USACE
Justin Troiano, Senator Hassan
David Trubey, DNCR - Division of Historical Resources
Chris Williams, Chair, NHDES Coastal Program
Adam Winkler, PDA-DPH
Steve Wolf, EPA

Legislative Update:

Chris Scott of Senator Shaheen's office stated that the Senate appropriations season is beginning in preparation for the federal fiscal year 2024 budget. The Senator's website has a portal available for constituents to input information regarding proposed congressionally directed spending and programmatic requests. Programmatic appropriation requests include requests for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers programs and projects. The information entered into the portal helps the Senator identify and prioritize appropriations requests.

Justin Troiano of Senator Hassan's office stated that appropriations are a focus in the Senate at this time. He stated that unlike Senator Shaheen, Senator Hassan does not have an online portal for submitting appropriation requests. He also stated that the deadline for submitting comments to the Senator regarding the Farm Bill is March 15th. The Farm Bill typically includes watershed related program and projects.

Portsmouth Harbor/Piscataqua River Federal Navigation Improvement Project:

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 2022.

Todd Randall, USACE, reminded members that in the summer of 2021, 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. All of the eelgrass was fouled by macro algae. After consulting with eelgrass experts from the University of New Hampshire (UNH), the Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership (PREP), and the Conservation Law Foundation (CLF), the USACE developed a plan to transplant eelgrass using a low-profile burlap disc methodology developed by the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (Mass DMF). In September 2022 the USACE conducted limited transplanting of approximately 200 plants in subtidal areas around Fishing Island in the lower part of the Piscataqua River in Kittery, Maine using the Mass DMF methodology. Unfortunately, when the USACE returned to the site in November 2022, all of the transplanted eelgrass was gone, including the discs and the stakes used to hold the discs in place. The USACE is scheduled to meet next week with the eelgrass team from UNH/PREP/CLF to discuss potential options for eelgrass transplantation this spring. The UNH/PREP/CLF team apparently had some success this past fall transplanting eelgrass elsewhere in the Great Bay Estuary. During next week's meeting the USACE hopes to determine whether to conduct another round of eelgrass transplantation or whether to pursue other mitigation options (e.g., saltmarsh restoration, payment into Maine's in-lieu-fee program).

Cheri Patterson, NHF&G, asked whether eelgrass restoration efforts must occur in Maine. Mr. Randall stated that the USACE's opinion is that restoration efforts can occur anywhere in the Piscataqua River/Great Bay Estuary system. However, because the eelgrass beds impacted by the project were located in Maine waters, the USACE will continue to coordinate closely with the State of Maine on restoration efforts.

Isles of Shoals Harbor of Refuge – Breakwaters Repair:

The 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.

Jen Thalhauser, USACE, stated that the USACE opened bids for the project in mid-February. The USACE received three bids, all approximately $8 million. Luciano's Excavation was the lowest qualified bidder. USACE is in the process of reviewing Luciano's Excavation's work plan. The USACE hopes to approve the work plan and award a contract by the end of March, with construction anticipated to begin in April.

Todd Randall, USACE, stated the USACE has agreed not perform any work on Star Island or the Star-Cedar Island breakwater after June 15 due to potential impacts to tourism. In addition, based on recommendations by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the USACE will not perform any work on the Cedar-Smuttynose Island breakwater or the Smuttynose-Malaga Island breakwater between April 1 and May 15 due to potential noise and visual impacts to nesting birds on Smuttynose Island.

Tracy Shattuck, PDA-DPH, asked where the contractor intends to load the rock for the project. Ms. Thalhauser stated that she believes the contractor intends to truck the rock from a quarry in Eliot, Maine and load it onto barges at a marina in Portsmouth. Mr. Shattuck stated that PDA-DPH had been contacted about using the Market Street Terminal in Portsmouth to load the rock. However, due to ongoing construction at the Terminal, stockpiling of rock and access to the pier will be difficult. Several members questioned whether there was another marina in Portsmouth suitable for offloading rock and loading rock onto barges. Ms. Thalhauser stated that she'd investigate this issue further.

Kaitlyn Shaw, National Marine Fisheries Service, asked if jack-up barges would be used to access the Star-Cedar Island breakwater. Ms. Thalhauser stated that although the contractor's plans area still being finalized, the current plan is to construct a rock work pad on the harbor side of the Star-Cedar Island breakwater to be used to load machinery onto Star Island. Machinery will then work from atop the Star-Cedar Island breakwater.

Chairman asked if all real estate/title issues had been resolved. Ms. Thalhauser stated that the USACE was unable to secure title for Cedar Island. Therefore, the USACE will not perform any work within approximately 30 feet of Cedar Island on both the Star-Cedar Island and Cedar-Smuttynose Island breakwaters.

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.

Ms. Thalhauser, USACE, stated that the USACE was unsuccessful in awarding a contract for the project last summer. There were several bidders, but due to a number of factors, the USACE canceled the solicitation. The USACE has made some changes to the project specifications and intends to put the project out to bid in mid-April or early May and award a contract by June if not sooner.

Chairman asked about the construction window for the project. Ms. Thalhauser stated that due to concerns raised by contractors about working in the area during the winter, the USACE coordinated with the NH Fish and Game Department on a modified construction window. As a result, work is scheduled to begin September 1, as opposed to the typical construction window start date of November 15. Ms. Thalhauser also stated that the USACE anticipates that work will be completed this fall.

Piscataqua River Simplex/Tyco Shoals Maintenance Dredging:
The Simplex/Tyco Shoals maintenance dredging project is part of the Portsmouth Harbor-Piscataqua River Federal Navigation Project. Recurring sand shoals form in the river and create safety issues for the vessels servicing the terminals along the river. Historically, the shoals have been dredged every 7-10 years. The shoals were last dredged in 2013. Dredging typically takes a couple of weeks to complete.

Ms. Thalhauser, USACE, stated that the USACE is scheduled to award a contract for the dredging this November. Environmental coordination with the states of New Hampshire and Maine has been completed. The USACE will be scheduling surveys of the area this spring so that plans and specifications can be updated, and a more accurate assessment of the dredge volume can be made. The USACE currently estimates that approximately 20,000 cubic yards of sand will be dredged with a hopper dredge. The dredged material will be placed in a deep spot downriver in Maine waters that's been used to place dredged material from the project in the past.

Chairman stated that at the last Task Force meeting in October 2022, the USACE indicated that approximately 42,000 cubic yards of sand would be dredged. He asked why the estimated volume of sand has been reduced by more than half. Mr. Randall, USACE, stated that the 42,000 cubic yard figure was an estimate based on historic dredge volumes. This figure was used in the USACE's environmental assessment developed for the project. Mr. Randall stated that it is generally preferred to overestimate the volume of dredge material than to underestimate it. He stated that the surveys to be conducted this spring will allow the USACE to further refine the estimated dredge volume.

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, the Pease Development Authority Division of Ports and Harbors (PDA-DPH)

Todd Randall, USACE, stated that the FID was approved by USACE Headquarters late last year. The USACE is in the process of developing a Project Management Plan (PMP) for the Section 107 Feasibility Study Agreement. The PMP includes a project scope, budget, and schedule. The USACE expects to complete the PMP in the spring of 2023 to support the Feasibility Study Cost Sharing Agreement with PDA-DPH.

Tracy Shattuck, PDA-DPH, confirmed that PDA-DPH is the project sponsor. He stated that the Feasibility Study Agreement requires a 50/50 (federal/state) cost share.

Discussion then focused on the status of the shoaling in the Harbor. Mr. Shattuck, Cheri Patterson (NHF&G), and Mr. Scott (Senator Shaheen) all acknowledged that shoaling is occurring in the Harbor. Mr. Shattuck suggested that the USACE consider surveying the Harbor given the extent of the shoaling.

Other Business:

Chairman stated that at the last Task Force meeting, Phil Winslow, Town of Rye Board of Selectmen, inquired about the status of the replacement of the Route 1B Bridge over Little

Harbor in Rye/New Castle. Chairman stated he reached out to NHDOT and inquired if an update on the project was warranted during today's meeting. Chairman did not receive a response from NHDOT. He will reach out to NHDOT again prior to the next Task Force meeting to determine whether enough progress has been made on the project to warrant an update at the next meeting.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 10:55am