

New Hampshire Dredge Management Task Force Meeting Minutes – January 17, 2024

**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):

Ken Anderson, Riverside & Pickering Marine
Austin Bashline, Resident, Town of Hampton
Gary Bashline, Resident, Town of Hampton
Kate Bashline, Resident, Town of Hampton
Alexander Binder, Great Lakes Dredge & Dock Company, LLC
Olivia Beaulieu, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
Mike Dionne, New Hampshire Fish and Game Department (NHF&G)
Loretta Doughty, NH Department of Transportation
Sean Duffey, Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management
Myles Greenway, Pease Development Authority Division of Ports and Harbors (PDA-DPH)
Jennifer Hale, Department of Public Works, Town of Hampton
Chris Holt, Portsmouth Pilots
Aaron Hopkins, USACE
Jordan Macy, USACE
Geno Marconi, PDA-DPH
Melissa Paly, Conservation Law Foundation
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
Coral Siligato, USACE
Jenifer Thalhauser, USACE
Justin Troiano, Senator Hassan
Chris Williams, Chair, NHDES Coastal Program
Steve Wolf, EPA

Legislative Update:

Chris Scott of Senator Shaheen’s office stated that there are no major legislative updates to report on. He stated that the Senate is working on a continuing resolution to keep the government funded.

Justin Troiano of Senator Hassan’s office reiterated that the Senate’s current work is focused on passing a budget.

Jenifer Thalhauser, USACE, stated that the USACE is in the process of developing its Fiscal Year

2026 budget.

Isles of Shoals Harbor of Refuge – Breakwaters Repair:

Background: 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.

Olivia Beaulieu, USACE, reminded members that a contract was awarded to Luciano's Excavation last spring. Work began in the early summer. Repairs to the Star Island - Cedar Island breakwater are complete. The contractor was also able to complete repairs to approximately 50 linear feet of the Cedar Island – Smuttynose Island breakwater before shutting down for the winter on January 5th. A storm right before Christmas caused some minor damage to the Star Island – Cedar Island breakwater. The contractor will repair this damage when they re-commence work in mid-March/early April. Once the damage to the Star Island – Cedar Island breakwater is complete and the repairs to the remaining length of the Cedar Island – Smuttynose Island breakwater are complete the contractor will repair the breakwater between Smuttynose Island and Malaga Island.

Chair asked if there were any issues encountered during construction and whether the stone was barged from New Bedford, MA as originally proposed. Ms. Beaulieu stated that other than some issues with the weather, there were no construction-related issues. She also confirmed that stone was trucked to New Bedford where it was loaded onto barges and hauled to the site.

Chair also asked if all work was conducted from atop the breakwaters? Ms. Beaulieu stated that all work was completed from atop the breakwaters except for a minor amount of in-water work on the lee side of the Star Island - Cedar Island breakwater. Kaitlyn Shaw, National Marine Fisheries Service, asked about the proximity of the in-water work to eelgrass beds in the area. Todd Randall, USACE, stated that the in-water work involved placement of some stone along the side slope of the breakwater to ensure the integrity of the breakwater as the construction machinery was moving along the top of the breakwater. The USACE does not believe any stone was placed in the eelgrass beds. The USACE will survey the area this spring/summer.

Chair then asked when construction was scheduled to be completed. Jenifer Thalhauser, USACE, stated that the authorized construction window is through October 2024 and the contractor will likely need the majority of the construction window to complete the necessary repairs.

Hampton Harbor Jetty Repair:

Background: 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 work is underway to repair the jetty. Stone is

being stockpiled at Hampton Beach State Park then loaded via crane onto a barge that feeds the stone to nearby jack-up barges. Repair work is being conducted from the jack-up barges. To date, only approximately twenty linear feet of the jetty has been repaired. This is primarily due to poor weather conditions but also due to equipment-related issues. The contractor, Luciano's Excavation, has brought in additional crew to help work on the project.

Ms. Siligato stated that due to the weather-related construction delays the contractor is approximately two months behind schedule. As a result, the USACE will be requesting an extension of the March 15th construction window to mid-to-late May.

Ken Anderson, Riverside and Pickering Marine, who is leading the project's marine operations, provided details of the weather-related impacts on the project.

Chair recommended that the USACE schedule a meeting with state agency staff, including the NHDES Wetlands Bureau, NH Fish & Game Department, State Parks, and the PDA – Division of Ports and Harbors, to discuss the extension request.

Seth Prescott, DNCR-State Parks, stated that since stone is being stockpiled in the Hampton Beach State Park parking lot, any delay in project completion could have an impact to State Parks' revenue. He also recommended that the USACE schedule a meeting to discuss the extension of the construction window.

Hampton Harbor Hydrodynamic Feasibility Study Federal Interest Determination:

Background: The USACE has approved a federal interest determination under its Section 107 (Small Harbors) Program to complete a hydrodynamic feasibility study to better understand the recurring shoaling in Hampton-Seabrook Harbor.

Jordan Macy, USACE, stated that not much has changed regarding the feasibility study since the last Dredge Management Task Force meeting. He reminded members that the USACE has developed a project management plan and draft feasibility cost sharing agreement, including fee and cost estimates, for the feasibility study. The USACE is awaiting funds from the Pease Development Authority Division of Ports and Harbors (PDA-DPH) to execute a cost sharing agreement.

Geno Marconi, PDA-DPH, stated that he recently submitted a request for funding for the study to the Governor's office.

Coral Siligato, USACE, stated that the USACE is hoping to coordinate the timing of the feasibility study with the next round of maintenance dredging of the harbor. She stated that the USACE would prefer to wait until after completions of the Route 1A bridge replacement project, which is scheduled for 2026, before dredging the harbor again. This is due to the fact that the new bridge may alter the hydrodynamics of the harbor.

Chris Scott, Senator Shaheen's office, asked if dredging the harbor could wait until 2026 given the shoaling that currently occurring.

Geno Marconi confirmed that he's contacted regularly by users of the harbor about the shoaling that occurring.

Jen Thalhauser, USACE, stated that the USACE intends to conduct a bathymetric survey of the harbor in the next couple of months.

Gary Bashline, Hampton Resident, asked if the dredged material from the harbor could be placed along the eroding shoreline adjacent to the southeast end of the Route 1A bridge.

Jennifer Hale, Hampton Department of Public Works, reminded members that approximately 10,000 cubic yards of dredged material was placed at that location the last time the harbor was dredged, but the material eroded fairly rapidly. Discussion followed.

Piscataqua River Simplex/Tyco Shoals Maintenance Dredging:

Background: 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.

Jenifer Thalhauser, USACE, stated that the USACE awarded a contract for the work to Cashman Dredging and Marine Contracting Company, LLC. Cashman's dredge used to perform the work is scheduled to leave Jacksonville, FL today with dredging beginning on/about January 25. The USACE estimates that approximately 60,000 cubic yards of sand needs to be dredged, which should take about two weeks to complete. 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. Discussion followed.

Chair asked about the issue that was raised at last meeting regarding the presence of a large rock in the center of the upper turning basin the Piscataqua River that was not removed as part of the recently completed Turning Basin Improvement Project.

Ms. Thalhauser stated that the USACE has another project in the Merrimack River with a similar obstruction. The USACE is looking to combine both the Piscataqua River and Merrimack River projects into one contract and is currently investigating the preferred method to remove the obstructions.

Kaitlyn Shaw, NMFS, asked if the USACE was considering blasting to remove the rock in the Piscataqua River. Jen Thalhauser stated that blasting would not be an option for removal.

Portsmouth Harbor/Piscataqua River Federal Navigation Improvement Project – Eelgrass Mitigation:

Background: 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. 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.

Todd Randall, USACE, gave a presentation summarizing the history of the USACE's eelgrass mitigation efforts, including locations, methodologies, and results, as well as eelgrass monitoring and assessment efforts within the dredge footprint. He stated that the USACE continues to seek viable eelgrass mitigation locations.

Mr. Randall then stated that the USACE continues to develop a report describing their eelgrass planting and monitoring efforts to date. The report will also recalculate and update the temporal impacts to eelgrass that were factored into the USACE's mitigation plan as well as discuss the USACE's monitoring efforts of the submerged aquatic vegetation in and around the dredge area. The USACE hopes to release the report in the next couple of months.

Melissa Paly, Conservation Law Foundation (CLF), asked how long the USACE would pursue in-situ eelgrass restoration alternatives before opting to mitigate for eelgrass impacts through Maine's in lieu fee program.

Mr. Randall stated that given the USACE's lack of success and the limited remaining funds available to perform restoration work, a decision whether to use Maine's in lieu fee program to mitigate eelgrass impacts would likely occur in the next couple of months.

Ms. Paly then stated that CLF and its partners have had some success with seed dispersal as a potential eelgrass restoration option. Discussion followed.

Other Business:

Steve Wolf, EPA, reminded members that the contractor for the Piscataqua River Turning Basin Improvement Project, which was completed in April 2022, disposed of some of the dredge material outside the footprint of the designated disposal site (a "short dump"). This resulted in enforcement action by the EPA. The result of that enforcement action was twofold: 1) a financial penalty; and 2) the contractor agreed to install "geo-fencing" software on its entire fleet of scows nationwide that is designed to ensure that disposal occurs in a pre-defined area. Discussion followed.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 11:35am