

Newport Restoration Advisory Board  
Project Committee Report-Dredging  
November 20, 2002

The recent issue of "Rhode Island Boating" has an item about the dredging situation marinas, boat yards, and yacht clubs on and near Narragansett Bay are facing.

Dredging still remains a dilemma in Rhode Island despite the USACE's signing of a "Record of Decision", pertaining to the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the dredging of the Providence River. The FEIS calls for an open ocean disposal site in the Rhode Island Sound area. Perhaps, this site could be used to help the marina operators to dispose of their dredged materials and help them to remain in business?

At present, some marina operators are seeking to dispose materials at an upland site, but are finding exorbitant fees being charged.

Many feel the efforts by ACE and the EPA task force looking for off shore disposal sites is not making much progress. It is time for all interested parties to unite and do what's in the best interests of the economy and the environment of Narragansett Bay.

Submitted by:

*Emmet E. Turley*

Emmet E. Turley, Chairperson

Enclosures:

- "R.I. Boating" - 'Marina Dredging'
- "The Providence River Dredging Plan"
- "Dredging News Online"

## The Providence River Dredging Plan

Conclusions reached by Army Corps of Engineers in Providence River and Harbor EIS carefully consider all the impacts of dredging and disposal, from potential oil-spills to commercial fishing from long and short term impacts on the natural environment, to the cost of home heating fuel



Commentary by Col. Brian E. Osterndorf  
District Engineer  
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Published in the Providence Journal, June 7, 2001

Later this summer, the Army Corps of Engineers will issue its Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the Providence River and Harbor Maintenance Dredging Project. Our role is to provide comprehensive scientific and engineering analysis of all the issues associated with this project, on behalf of the State of Rhode Island, the project sponsor. This impact statement is a lengthy one, consisting of the details of extensive testing and analysis of various alternatives for how dredging would be done and how the material has accumulated in the federal channel over the 30 years since the channel was last dredged will be managed. The purpose of the EIS is to select a disposal site to be used a limited period of time (5 years, with provisions for a 5-year extension) that provides the best solution for maintaining the Providence River channel and 23 private facilities (9 commercial terminals and 14 marinas) in the area.

The dialogue that has occurred over the past several years and the decisions that are to be made are very important to the economic health and environmental well-being of citizens of Rhode Island. Many people and organizations have contributed immensely to developing this plan and identifying good choices. Stakeholders include the Rhode Island legislature and the Coastal Resources Management Council, Governor Almond and his staff, the entire Rhode Island congressional delegation, Save The Bay and other environmental groups, port operators and ship owners, federal and state agencies and hundreds of private citizens.

Maintaining the channel is critical to Rhode Island. The extensive shoaling in the 40 foot channel – in some places, the shoaling is over 10 feet – restricts the efficient passage of tankers into the port, and the resultant delays and requirements for transferring the oil to shallower draft vessels (lightering) while in the Bay increase the cost of fuel and pose spill risks. As we consider the removal and subsequent disposition of the approximate 4.3 million cubic yards of sediment necessary to restore the channel to its authorized dimensions, it is important that we assess the environmental, commercial and recreational impacts dredging would have on the valuable resources of Narragansett Bay and Rhode Island Sound. Consequently, the conclusions we reached after our testing and analysis do not point to strictly a cheapest solution, without regard to impacts. Rather, we have concluded that an open ocean disposal site, not a site in the bay, is the best solution for the disposal of material that is tested and found suitable for open water disposal, even

though this would necessitate an over 70 mile round trip from the dredge site to the disposal site. The public review and participation has helped us get to this point.

Not all of the material that needs to be removed from the channel is suitable for disposal in this conventional manner. Over one million cubic yards of contaminated sediments will "buried" in 5 large pits sited in the channel itself, near the Fox Point area. We have had great success in using this technique in dredging Boston Harbor. Moreover, this method provides an opportunity for the beneficial use of the material that would be removed from these pits, or more technically, confined aquatic disposal cells (CADs). Whereas the very silty and fine material we are removing from the channel has no commercial or construction value, the approximately 900 thousand cubic yards of material we will dig up to create these cells is more coarse-grained sand and gravel and has high potential for beneficial use. In fact, we are delaying the publication of the EIS slightly to allow us to more fully consider how Rhode Island might use this good material, which might normally cost \$10 more per cubic yard, for such projects as the I-195 improvement work. Additionally, even a cubic yard of material that can be used beneficially will not have to be disposed of in the ocean there will be one cubic yard less impact on activities like commercial fishing.

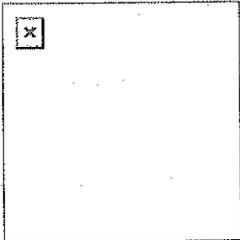
Our conclusions carefully consider the impacts of depositing dredged material in the Rhode Island Sound. There are many very productive fishing sites throughout the Sound and we took extra care to find a site that would impact commercial fishermen the least. The quantity of material to be placed will cover 730 acres (by creating opportunities for beneficial use of material the disposal site area can be reduced from 860 acres) and even our best site selection could result in an estimated cost to Rhode Island fishermen of \$100 thousand. We expect, and have seen at the several other disposal sites we maintain along the New England coast, that this impact will be temporary and ocean plant and animal systems recover within about one year of disposal activity.

We also carefully considered channel dimensions to determine if the full channel width and depth were still necessary. We analyzed considerable data on current and projected vessel traffic and evaluated several alternative width and depth combinations. We used recognized design reference criteria which gave us insights on safe and efficient vessel transit and concluded that the full authorized dimensions of the channel should be maintained. There is also sound economic analysis to support this conclusion. Each Rhode Island family will save on its home-heating bill each year if the channel was maintained 40 feet instead of 37 feet, and the oil tankers won't have to wait for high tides to transit the terminals. We did optimize the channel dimensions in two areas no longer used in the upper most part of the channel and will not have to dredge and dispose of about 400,000 cubic yards as a result.

The bulk of our analysis involved the selection of the best disposal site, but we also studied how we could conduct the dredging itself in a manner that was most efficient and at the same time, most protective of the fish and shellfish, particularly the winter flounder that live in or near the channel. These are not mutually exclusive considerations and we have devised a plan that sequences our work in such a fashion that we can dredge all the way around while significantly avoiding areas that are most sensitive during periods we know fish spawn. Not only would we save costs associated with mobilizing and demobilizing dredging equipment, but we would be able to complete the dredging sooner and deliver

benefits to you earlier.

We will publish the EIS in mid-August this year, conduct a public meeting and provide public a 45-day comment period. The Corps will publish details of how to access the EIS where the public meeting will be held and how to provide comments. We will also need to apply for Rhode Island approvals, specifically a Water Quality Certification and Coastal Zone Management Consistency Concurrence to perform the dredging and disposal. Should we not determine something new in the period between the publication of the EIS and the permit issue, I will be able to sign a Record of Decision. We are optimistic, that with your support and the continued support of all stakeholders, that we will be able to begin maintaining the channel in the fall of 2002 and deliver a safe and effective channel by the summer of 2004.



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## Corps signs EIS record of decision on Providence River

The US Army Corps of Engineers, New England District has signed the Record of Decision in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act pertaining to the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Providence River and Harbor Maintenance Dredging Project in Providence, Rhode Island.

"The Record of Decision states the US Army Corps of Engineers intention to dredge the Federal channel, the methods and locations of the Federal dredging, and the methods and locations of dredged material disposal," said District Engineer Colonel Brian Osterdorf, of the New England District. "This plan provides the best solution for meeting the immediate maintenance needs of the harbor while providing prudent safeguards for the environment."

"We intend to dredge the navigation channel to 40ft deep and 600ft wide to restore the full congressionally authorized project dimensions," O'Donnell said. "We will not dredge the segment at the upstream end of the project and the section along the East Providence shoreline near Watchemoket Cove as identified in the FEIS."

Maintenance dredging will be performed using an enclosed clamshell bucket dredge and no overflow of the scow will be allowed while it is being filled.

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