



US Army Corps
of Engineers®
New England District

PUBLIC NOTICE

In Reply Refer to: Coral Siligato
Email: nae-pn-nav@usace.army.mil
Phone: (978) 318-8012
Programs and Project Management Division
Date: January 19, 2024
Comment Period Closes: February 19, 2024

30 DAY PUBLIC NOTICE MAINTENANCE DREDGING OF THE SOUTHPORT HARBOR FEDERAL NAVIGATION PROJECT FAIRFIELD, CONNECTICUT

Interested parties are hereby notified that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), New England District, plans to perform work in the navigable waters of this District, subject to the provisions of Section 404 of the Clean Water Act of 1977 (Public Law (P.L.) 95-217) and subject to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (P.L. 91-190). The work involves maintenance dredging of the Southport Harbor Federal Navigation Project (FNP) and placement of the sandy dredged material at the Southport Harbor Nearshore Placement Site (SHNPS), located within Southport Harbor (Attachment 1). The project is authorized by the Rivers and Harbors Act of March 2, 1829 and supplemented by enactments to the Rivers and Harbors Act of August 30, 1935 as well as the Water Resources Development Acts of September 25, 1996 and November 8, 2007. Attachment 2 lists pertinent laws, regulations, and directives.

Project Description: The proposed work consists of dredging approximately 20,000 cubic yards (CY) of primarily sandy material from one shoaled area (totaling approximately 1 acre) within the 9-foot entrance channel of the Southport Harbor FNP located in Fairfield, Connecticut. The project was last maintained by USACE in 2005, and most recently maintained by the town of Fairfield in 2014-2015 when they removed approximately 6,500 CY of sand from the project. Since that work, a large sand shoal has encroached significantly into the channel (Figure 1). This area would be dredged to the authorized project depth plus one foot of allowable over depth. The proposed work consists of two parts: 1) material will be hydraulically dredged with a hopper dredge and placed for beneficial use at the SHNPS and 2) shoaled material unreachable by the hopper dredge arms would be stockpiled with excavators and placed into the hopper bin of the hopper dredge, and then placed for beneficial use at SHNPS (Figure 1) located to the west of the entrance channel for benthic habitat enhancement for shellfish (oysters). The project will be dredged between October 1 and February 1 in the year(s) in which funds become available, contingent upon availability of necessary approvals.

No dredging would occur in areas of the channels that are currently deeper than the authorized project depths. In addition, no dredging would occur in areas of the channel or

harbor containing significant fractions of silt. Minimal impacts to marine resources are expected and include short-term increases in turbidity and the removal of portions of the benthic resources in the dredging area and placement site. Benthic resources are expected to recolonize the disturbed areas over time.

Purpose of Work: Natural shoaling processes have reduced the available channel by over half in the 100-foot-wide channel with some portions of the 9-foot-deep entrance channel intertidal at +12.2 feet MLLW. The existing shoaling in the Southport Harbor FNP severely restricts the channel width and makes vessels susceptible to groundings and exposes them to hazardous conditions at periods of low tides. The purpose of this project is to restore the major shoaled areas of the Southport Harbor FNP navigation channel to the authorized dimensions by removing approximately 20,000 CY of sandy material, restore channel dimensions to improve vessel navigation, and place dredged material in the most appropriate location incorporating beneficial use of material where feasible.

Alternatives: In addition to the proposed action (maintenance dredging), the Environmental Assessment evaluated the no action alternative, which serves as a baseline against which the proposed action and alternatives can be evaluated. Several dredging methods considered for this project include hydraulic pipeline dredges, hopper dredges, and mechanical dredges. Dredged material disposal locations that were considered include open water ocean disposal, near shore aquatic placement, beach nourishment, and upland placement.

Open Water Disposal

The nearest U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designated open water dredged material disposal sites are the Central Long Island Sound Disposal area (CLDS) and the Western Long Island Sound Disposal area (WLDS), which are 20 miles and 8 miles from Southport Harbor respectively. While these open water placement alternatives are viable alternatives for the Southport Harbor material, the use of a nearshore placement site is preferred as it uses the material beneficially and is less costly than other disposal alternatives.

Nearshore Placement

The Southport Harbor Nearshore Placement Site (SHNPS) (Figure 1) was considered as a possible placement site for the Southport Harbor material. This alternative would allow for the beneficial placement of the sandy dredged material in a nearshore area to create a slight raise in elevation that could serve to support the placement of oyster shell (cultch) and therefore oyster habitat. Should cultch not be placed on the site, the littoral processes in the area are predicted to move the material over time onto Southport Beach to the north of the site, thereby providing a source of beach nourishment. Material in the Southport Harbor FNP is predominately sandy material as is the material at the SHNPS and Southport Beach and as such, the use of this nearshore site is a viable and beneficial option for this project.

Beach Nourishment

Beach nourishment was considered for the placement of the sandy material from the Southport Harbor FNP. This alternative would involve using either a hydraulic pipeline dredge to pump the sandy material directly onto either Sasco Hill Beach (to the east of the FNP) or onto Southport Beach (to the west of the FNP) or using a combination of hopper dredge, excavators, dozers, and trucks to remove the sandy material and haul the sand to Sasco Hill Beach to be graded. While beach placement is a feasible alternative, it was not selected as the preferred alternative.

Beach placement was not selected as the preferred alternative for several reasons. The Town of Fairfield surveyed Sasco Hill Beach in May 2023 and concluded that the beach was not in need of material, thus eliminating direct placement of sand on Sasco Hill Beach as an alternative. The preferred dredging method involves using a Government-owned hopper dredge in tandem with long-reach excavators to remove the shoal on the eastern side of the FNP. Placing material at Southport Beach using this methodology would require rehandling and transporting the sandy material to the western side of the harbor thus increasing costs and environmental impacts. Additionally, should the sandy material placed at the SHNPS be mobilized, it is anticipated to move towards and onto Southport Beach. Therefore, placing the material directly onto Southport Beach was not selected as the preferred alternative.

Upland Placement

There are no local public or private landfills in Fairfield that could accommodate the quantity or quality of material from Southport Harbor. Other upland disposal options were not considered practicable because of the high cost of dewatering, trucking and, if disposed at a landfill, tipping fees. The double handling of the dredged material that would be required if an upland site were chosen would also make the cost of the project unfeasible. In addition, given the clean, sandy nature of the material to be dredged and the availability of a nearshore beneficial use placement site and beach placement options, upland placement is not an appropriate disposal alternative for the proposed project. Therefore, upland placement was not considered for further review.

Additional Information: Additional information may be obtained from the Programs and Project Management Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Project Manager, Ms. Coral Siligato, at 978-318-8012, or email at nae-pn-nav@usace.army.mil.

Coordination: The proposed work was, or will be coordinated with the following agencies:

Federal:
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Coast Guard

National Marine Fisheries Service

State of Connecticut:

Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection

State Historic Preservation Office

State of Connecticut Department of Agriculture – Bureau of Aquaculture

Tribal Nations:

Delaware Tribe

Delaware Nation

Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation

Mohegan Tribe

Narragansett Tribe

Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah)

Local:

Southport Harbor Commission

Fairfield Conservation Commission

Fairfield Selectmen

Fairfield Shellfish Commission

Environmental Impacts: An environmental assessment is available for review upon request. I have made a preliminary determination that an environmental impact statement for the proposed maintenance dredging is not required under the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. This determination will be reviewed in light of facts submitted in response to this notice.

Other Information:

- a. Local Sponsor: Town of Fairfield, Connecticut
- b. Floodplain Management: In accordance with Executive Order 11988, USACE has determined that the proposed work will not contribute to negative impacts or damages caused by floods.
- c. Endangered Species: It is our preliminary determination that the project is not likely to adversely affect threatened or endangered species. USACE is in consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure that the proposed activity will not significantly affect any species or critical habitat designated as endangered or threatened pursuant to the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (87 Stat. 844).
- d. Cultural Resources: USACE is in coordination of this project with the Connecticut SHPO and appropriate tribes in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended and 36 CFR 800.

e. Essential Fish Habitat Assessment: USACE has determined that the project may have a temporary adverse effect on Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). The project site is contained within areas designated as EFH as defined by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and amended by the Sustainable Fisheries Act of 1996 for federally-managed fish species. USACE assessed the effects that the project is likely to have on EFH and determined that they will be short-term and localized and that there will be no significant impacts on the designated fisheries resources. USACE is in consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service to ensure that any potential impacts will be minimized.

f. Additional Requirements: USACE will request a 401 Water Quality Certificate and a Coastal Zone Management Consistency Determination Concurrence from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Agency.

The decision whether to perform the proposed work will be based on an evaluation of the probable impact, including cumulative impacts, of the proposed activity on the public interest. That decision will reflect the national concern for both protection and utilization of important resources. The benefits that reasonably may be expected to accrue from the proposal will be balanced against its reasonably foreseeable detriments. All factors which may be relevant to the proposal will be considered including the cumulative effects thereof; among those are conservation, economics, aesthetics, general environmental concerns, wetlands, historic properties, fish and wildlife values, flood hazards, floodplain values, land use, navigation, shoreline erosion and accretion, recreation, water supply and conservation, water quality, energy needs, safety, food and fiber production, mineral needs, considerations of property ownership and, in general, the needs and welfare of the people.

Please bring this notice to the attention of anyone you know to be interested in this project. Comments are invited from all interested parties and should be directed to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New England District, 696 Virginia Road, Concord, MA 01742-2751, ATTN: Coral Siligato; or emailed to nae-pn-nav@usace.army.mil within 30 days of this notice.

18 January 2024

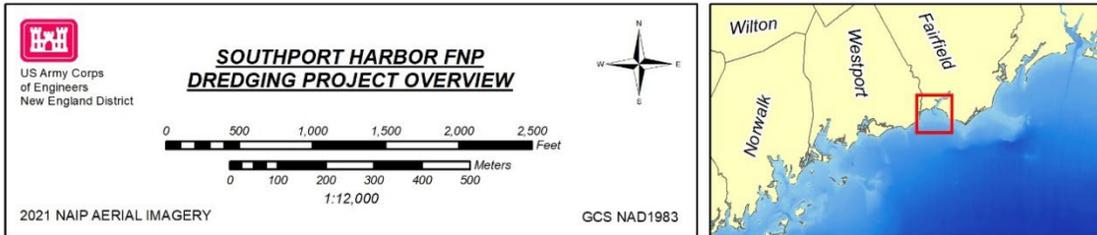
Date

Scott Acone
Deputy District Engineer
USACE, New England District

Attachments

Attachment 1

SOUTHPORT HARBOR FEDERAL NAVIGATION PROJECT DREDGE AREA AND PLACEMENT SITE



Attachment 2

PERTINENT LAWS, REGULATIONS, AND DIRECTIVES

Clean Water Act, as amended (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.)

Code of Federal Regulations, Title 33, Parts 335 through 338

National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.)

Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (16 U.S.C. 661-667e)

Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 (16 U.S.C. 742a, et seq.)

Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 (16 U.S.C. 1456)

National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (54 U.S.C. 300101 et seq.)

Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.)

Clean Air Act, as amended (42 U.S.C. 7401 et seq.)

Estuary Protection Act (16 U.S.C. 1221 et seq.)

Federal Water Project Recreation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460L-12 et seq.)

Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965, as amended (54 U.S.C. 200302 et seq.)

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, as amended by the Sustainable Fisheries Act of 1996 (16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.)

Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management, 24 May 1977

Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands, 24 May 1977

Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low Income Populations, 11 February 1994

Executive Order 13045, Protection of Children from Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks, 21 April 1997