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D E L A W A R E R I V E R D E E P E N I N G P R O J E C T

STOP THE RACE TO THE BOTTOM CUT FUNDING FOR DEEPENING THE DELAWARE RIVER

Originally authorized in 1992, the Delaware River Deepening project has continually failed to meet the basic tests of an environmentally and economically sound investment. This is a classic case of a senseless race among U.S. ports and harbors to deepen channels to accommodate some of the largest and deepest draft ships. This project is designed to deepen the Delaware River's shipping channel from 40 to 45 feet for more than 100 miles from the Philadelphia/Camden area to the Atlantic Ocean in order to accommodate larger container ships and tankers. The General Accounting Office (GAO) found the Corps' economic analysis of the \$420 million (\$286 for initial construction) Delaware project was so riddled with serious errors that it was rendered unreliable. In addition, the project would produce more than 26 million cubic yards of new dredged spoil materials from initial construction and an additional 60 million cubic yards from maintenance dredging with much of that material contaminated with toxins.

The Bush Administration's FY2004 budget has recommended only \$300,000 for further study of this environmentally destructive boondoggle. Despite the fact that the project has received substantial funds in past years, construction has never begun. In July 2002, the General Accounting Office (GAO) identified several miscalculations, invalid assumptions and the use of significantly outdated information in the Corps' economic analysis. According to the GAO, the data supports only about 1/3 of the estimated annual project benefits claimed by the Corps. In light of the GAO's recommendation for a new economic analysis, the Corps halted progress on the project. In December 2002, the Corps completed a reanalysis that claims a positive benefit for the project, but continues to include large errors and unsubstantiated assumptions that greatly overstate benefits and understate costs.

THE DELAWARE RIVER, ESTUARY AND BAY ARE A CRITICAL NATURAL RESOURCE SYSTEM

Approximately eight million people live within the Delaware River Estuary watershed, with many depending on it for food and drinking water. The extensive wetlands in the Delaware Estuary provide essential habitat for many species, including the critically important horseshoe crab, migrating shorebirds and waterfowl, bald eagles, ospreys, northern harrier, waders (including yellow and black crowned night herons) and raptors. The area functions as a critical staging ground for 80 percent of the Atlantic flyway population of Snow Geese. Several federal and state endangered species are supported in the river and bay area, including the bald eagle, peregrine falcon, piping plover, pied-billed grebe, short-eared owl, delmarva fox squirrel, sandbar shark and shortnose sturgeon. The federally threatened loggerhead sea turtle and the federally endangered Kemp's Ridley, green, hawksbill and leatherback turtles also occur in Delaware Bay.

It has been eleven years since Congress authorized the project, yet construction has not begun. The States of New Jersey and Delaware, and members of Congress have criticized the Corps' economic and environmental analyses. In 2001, former Sen. Robert Torricelli (D-NJ), Sen. Jon Corzine (D-NJ), Reps. Rob Andrews (D-NJ), James Saxton (R-NJ) and Frank LoBiondo (R-NJ) requested a GAO investigation of the project. The New Jersey State legislature has also refused to provide local funds for the project and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection recently revoked the Corps' permit to build the project. The state of Delaware is currently assessing whether the planned dredging would harm its waters and aquatic wildlife resources.



Source: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

DOES ANYONE BENEFIT?

According to the GAO, of the \$40.1 million estimated annual project benefits identified by the Corps, only \$13.3 million can be supported. The Corps claims that six oil refineries will enjoy 60 percent of the project benefits. Yet, none of these facilities have committed to deepening their private channels and docks in order to actually use the deeper channel. In addition to basic calculation errors, the GAO found that the Corps' predictions and assumptions regarding crude oil shipments were unrealistic and invalid. Moreover, the Corps used outdated information that does not reflect current shipping practices and trends.

WHERE WILL THE CORPS PUT THE MILLIONS OF CUBIC YARDS OF DREDGE SPOILS?

The Corps and local project sponsor do not have any place to dispose much of the dredge material. Three of the four new confined disposal facilities identified by the Delaware River Port Authority and the Army Corps of Engineers have been or are in the process of being acquired by other entities for development. Without these sites, the cost of dredge disposal stands to rise significantly, possibly by hundreds of millions of dollars. In addition, last minute proposals to dump main channel sand to replenish several Delaware Beaches have raised serious concerns that such efforts could damage or destroy horseshoe crab spawning habitat and sabellaria reefs designated Essential Fish Habitat under Magnuson Stevens Act.

HOW WILL THE CORPS ENSURE AFFECTED WILDLIFE WILL BE PROTECTED?

Several critically important wildlife and environmental issues—including mitigating impacts and limiting dredging to specified months for the protection of horseshoe crabs, blue crabs, winter flounder, and the federally listed endangered short-nosed sturgeon and safeguarding Sabellaria reefs—remain unresolved. Dredging operations and barges will also emit significant quantities of ozone-causing nitrogen oxide in a region that already has severe ozone problems. The Corps also completely ignored Clean Air Act compliance for dredging activities. In most cases, the Corps admits that the cost associated with resolving a number of these problems either has not yet been identified or is not reflected in the project's current analysis of benefits and costs.

The delusion that a deeper navigation channel will bring larger container ships to the ports of Philadelphia and Camden is driving this project. Experts hired by the Delaware River Port Authority determined that there is no guarantee that such mega ships will ever call here. According to these experts, at its present 40 foot depth, the Delaware River can effectively fulfill its growing role as a feeder port for the containership industry. These experts found that at 40 feet "... the Port can accommodate the majority of the existing and newly constructed containerships that are in service today and for the foreseeable future."

THREATS THIS PROJECT POSES TO PUBLIC HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT:

Deepening and widening the shipping channel will allow salt water to flow further into the Delaware River's freshwater systems, potentially contaminating drinking water and industrial water supplies.

There is no viable plan for safely disposing the dredge material, which will be enough to fill every professional baseball stadium in America to the brim after the initial construction alone.

Dredging and disposing of the dredged material could disrupt important spawning habitats for the Delaware Bay's fragile horseshoe crabs, the largest population in the world, which attracts the second largest population of migrating shorebirds in North America.

Rock blasting could significantly jeopardize federally endangered shortnose sturgeon living in the Delaware Estuary.

Dredging operations and barges will produce significant quantities of ozone-causing emissions in the Philadelphia region, which is currently at risk for high ozone levels that could lead to increased susceptibility to respiratory infections and significant decreases in lung function for exposed individuals.