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U.S. Army Corps looks at Port of Newport marina dredging

(NEWPORT, OR) On Dec. 2, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) notified the Port of Newport that it will begin a new feasibility study in 2020 on establishing an adequate channel into and out of the Port's commercial marina, as well as to and from the commercial hoist dock used for transferring fish products to trucks for transport.

Port Director of Operations Aaron Bretz outlined the need for the dredging in a letter to USACE officials in February, describing the major changes in the fishing industry and specifically in fishing vessels since the marina was created.

"The layout of the Port's commercial marina was created in the 1960s at a time when the average commercial fishing vessel was exponentially smaller than they are in the modern day," Bretz stated. "The fishing industry has undergone significant consolidation and regular moorage holders are upward of 80 feet in length."

Operating at 115 percent capacity, the Port struggles to find sufficient berthing spaces for larger fishing vessels. While the Port has been considering options to address those needs over the long term, plans must first begin with addressing channel depths. New dredging will create an opportunity for Port Dock 7 to accommodate larger vessels once new docks are put in place.

The Port requested a federal channel be dredged to 20' below MLW (mean low water) through the entire marina. It would also create a turning basin and a deep channel to the hoist dock for larger boats.

"While the berths don't yet have the depth to accommodate large fishing vessels at the east end of the marina, this project would be the stepping-off point to future projects that will establish that depth," the Director of Operations said.

The first step is for USACE to gather available information to form a Federal Interest Determination (FID), which will help them decide whether continuing on to a feasibility study is consistent with the program under which it would be funded. The first \$100,000 in this process is provided by federal funds, which is expected to cover all of the FID costs. If the project moves into the feasibility phase, the Port of Newport would have a 50% cost-share to consider.

"If the dredging project is ultimately undertaken, it would make ongoing maintenance dredging for that channel the responsibility of the Army Corps. The project results are extremely valuable to the region, and the investment by the Port will be relatively low," Bretz explained.

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