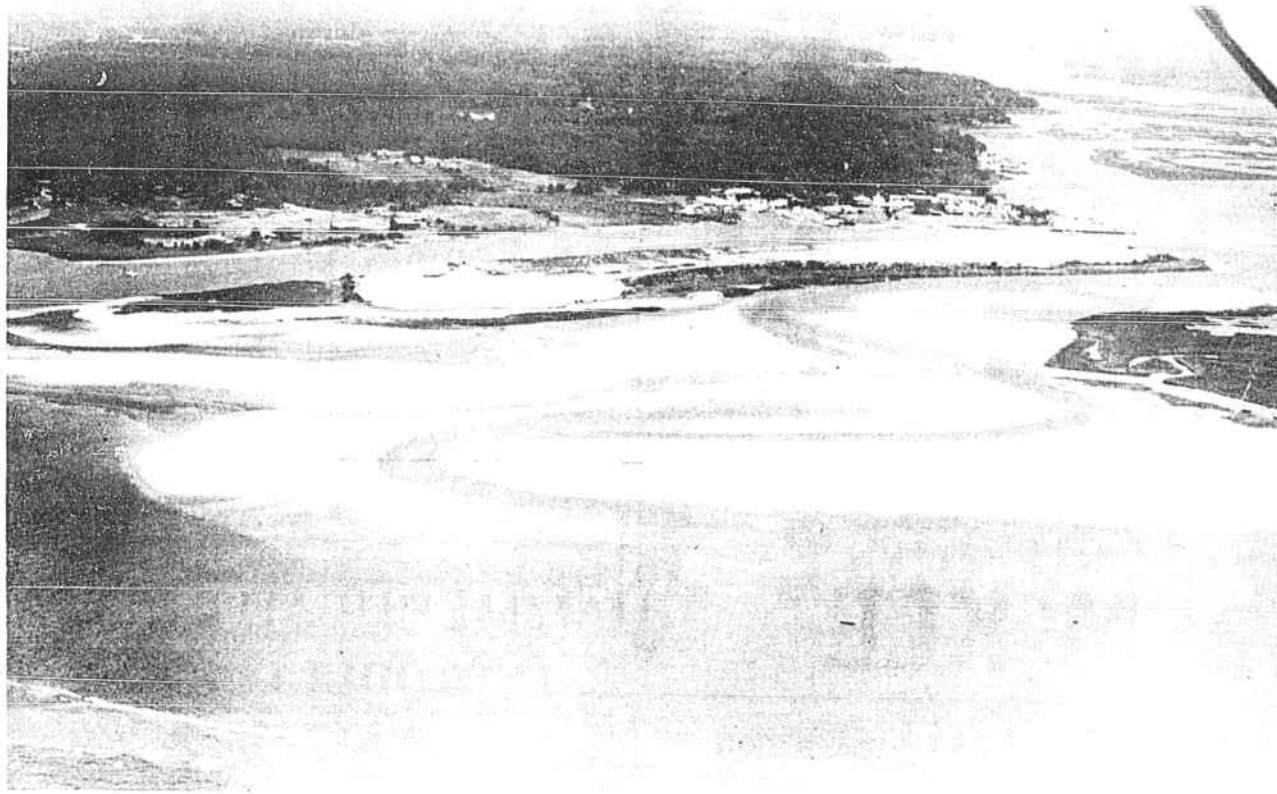


Shalotte River Dredging Will Not Help Ocean Isle



HOMES ON OCEAN Isle's east end are facing the threat of erosion. Corps of Engineers officials said fill material from the Shallotte River cannot be pumped onto the strand for renourishment in the fall.



THIS AERIAL view of the Shallotte Inlet shows a beautiful pattern of sand deposits; however, the view isn't too pleasing for boaters. Ocean Isle Beach officials have tried unsuccessfully to have the inlet dredged.

BY TERRY POPE

A fall dredging of the Shallotte River will not help east-end residents of Ocean Isle Beach who are facing the threat of erosion.

The U.S. Corps of Engineers plans to start dredging the river in either October or November, but sand from the project cannot be pumped onto the strand for beach renourishment, Corps officials have said.

Town commissioners have invited representatives from the Corps' Wilmington office to their July 21 (Tuesday) meeting at 9 a.m. to explain why the sand is unsuitable for the strand. East-end property owners also plan to attend.

"The material from the Shallotte River has too much silt in it for them to use it," said David Hewitt, spokesman the Corps office in Wilmington. "Material from the Intracoastal Waterway is of a better quality."

However, the Corps has no plans to dredge parts of the Intracoastal Waterway or the Shallotte Inlet this fall. Town officials have asked the Corps to include the inlet in the fall dredging project and to place any available fill material onto the beach strand.

"That's not possible," Hewitt said of the town's request to dredge the inlet.

Hewitt said the Corps needs a congressional authorization to keep a channel in the inlet open before it can provide maintenance on such a project. The department would also need to prepare an economic and environmental study on the effects of dredging the Shallotte Inlet.

"Just looking at it, without even doing a study," Hewitt said, "we know right off that it is just not economically feasible."

The location of two nearby channels maintained by the Corps, Lockwood Folly and Little River inlets, makes it economically unfeasible to keep Shallotte Inlet's channel dredged for commercial and recreational boating.

Hewitt said the Corps will dredge the Shallotte River, from the mouth at the Intracoastal Waterway to the docks at Larry Holden's Seafood at Shallotte Point, in the fall.

"We had been asked to do that and we looked into it," Hewitt said. "Right now, we plan to go ahead with it in the fall."

In March, Ocean Isle Mayor LaDane Bullington had asked Sen. Jesse Helms to lobby for support in dredging the inlet. A letter the town recently received from Helms also included a copy of the Corps' response to the legislator's inquiry.

Col. Paul Woodbury, a Corps district engineer, said in his letter to Helms that improvements for the Shallotte Inlet have been sought since 1960 and that "the feasibility of a Federal project for this inlet has been studied extensively by the Corps of Engineers."

"Recent policy on recreation prohibits the use of recreation benefits if they are necessary for economic justification of the project," Col. Woodbury stated. "In the case of the Shallotte Inlet, the commercial navigation benefits are substantially less than the cost for the navigation improvements."

Col. Woodbury also stated that "until economic conditions change substantially, further studies do not appear warranted."


He added that maintenance dredging of the Intracoastal Waterway more than two years ago to replenish the Ocean Isle Beach strand was conducted only in the waterway. "There is no Federal project at Shallotte Inlet nor is it a part of any other Federal project," he stated.

Upon learning of this, the town asked that dredge material from the Shallotte River be pumped onto the beach strand this fall, even if the town had to pay for extending the lines.

The purpose of Tuesday's meeting with the Corps, Mayor Bullington said, is to discuss why Shallotte River dredge material cannot be pumped onto the strand.

"We'll make them convince us that they can't place it on the beach," Ms. Bullington told the board.

STAFF PHOTOS BY TERRY POPE



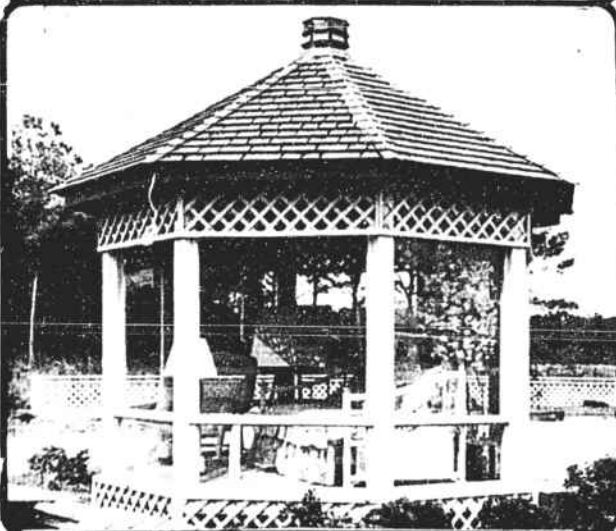
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