

# Corps: Eastern Channel Dredging Benefits May Not Justify Cost

BY SUSAN USHER

While Ocean Isle Beach is forging ahead with plans for a proposed U.S. Army Corps of Engineers berm/dune project to protect the island community from erosion, town commissioners' proposal to dredge Eastern Channel may not fare as well.

Commissioners Bill Benton and Ken Proctor and Engineer Finley Boney have been investigating dredging of the channel—also known as Old Sound Creek—from its eastern beginnings to Tubbs Inlet between Ocean Isle Beach and Sunset Beach. The project would eliminate shoals and improve navigation for recreational and commercial boaters and fishermen.

Col. Robert J. Sperberg, the Corps' Wilmington District engineer, advised the town last week that the project, like a similar proposal in

1992 to dredge Shallotte Inlet, may not create enough economic benefit to justify its cost.

In Shallotte Inlet vessel damage due to grounding is a persistent problem and the inlet is too shallow for use by larger commercial fishing vessels, which have to travel up or down the Intracoastal Waterway, at extra expense, to gain an outlet to the ocean.

He said aerial photographs suggest Eastern Channel is used mainly by recreational boats, and that Corps policy precludes spending money for civil works projects that mainly benefit recreation.

Sperberg didn't rule out another possibility.

"If you believe the project has potential for high priority benefits such as commercial navigation," he wrote, the town can continue its pur-

suit of the project.

The three-man committee is to review the materials Sperberg sent and make a recommendation to the full board.

## Seeks Grant For Water Tank

After lengthy discussion, commissioners voted unanimously at their meeting Tuesday to apply to the N.C. Division of Environmental Management for a low-interest loan that, if awarded, would be used to build a 500,000-gallon elevated water storage tank next fall that town engineer Finley Boney says the town already needs. Commissioners are asking for a loan of \$600,000, which the town would match with \$70,000 of its own.

The new tank would bring the town's water storage capacity to 700,000 gallons.

"You need a one-day supply of water in elevated storage to meet peak usage for potable water and fire protection," Boney said, noting that the resort community's "peak" use ranges from as little as 100,000 gallons per day in the off-season to 750,000 gallons to 1 million gallons a day in mid-summer.

Commissioners first considered applying for the loan in March but tabled action until fall, without providing for the project in the 1994-95 budget. Most were hesitant again Tuesday because the town doesn't have the required matching funds on hand and doesn't want to deplete its water system reserve account, money set aside for major repairs in the event of a disaster and for long-term upkeep.

Boney said most of the matching money would not be spent until after the start of the next budget year and

that interest rates are attractively low. Utility Commissioner Odell Williamson noted that if the grant isn't awarded in this cycle, the town's odds of receiving the money next spring might increase.

Most commissioners opposed the idea of raising property taxes to finance the project, but supported a suggestion from Kendall Suh. "I think if we fund it with a small water rate increase people won't complain because they will see where the money is going. They'll see a water tank going up," the commissioner said.

## Other Business

Commissioners also:

■ set a workshop for Wednesday, Sept. 28, at 8:30 a.m. at town hall to discuss with local contractors and property owners' association managers ways to locate replacement heating and air conditioning units above flood level. The change is needed to reduce the risk of flood-related damage, and in the process, protect the 8 percent discount in flood insurance premiums currently available to town property owners.

■ voted unanimously to pursue collection of approximately \$20,000 in franchise fees from Vision Cable. After the town upped the franchise

fee from 3 percent to 5 percent, the cable company failed for a number of years to collect or to pay the fee. Barring future action by commissioners, the fee stands at 5 percent.

■ adopted a countywide water supply plan, subject to review and approval by Mayor Betty Williamson, engineer Finley Boney and Commissioner Ken Proctor.

Required by the state to ensure that communities don't extend water service beyond their capability of providing potable water, the plans will be checked anytime a town or county with a water system applies for approval to extend lines or services, said Boney. That includes Ocean Isle's current proposal to extend water service to four new streets.

■ reconsidered, with no change in the town's position, a request from property owner Edward Toczyski to build a sandbag berm to protect his home at the end of East Second Street, which is threatened by erosion as are numerous other east end properties. Commissioners agreed with member Kendall Suh, who said "the town is not in the business of protecting individual properties, but it is working on (a long-range plan for) protecting the entire island, which is its responsibility."

## Longer Wait Among Flood Insurance Changes

Coastal home and business owners who once waited until a hurricane began to form in the Caribbean to take out costly federal flood insurance on their property soon won't have that option.

That's just one of the changes in the federal flood insurance program that is expected to be signed into law within the next few weeks, Ocean Isle Beach Building Inspector Druied Roberson said Tuesday.

Instead of a five-day waiting period, policies will have to have been in effect for 30 days for coverage.

The change was prompted not by hurricane-watchers, but by the Federal Emergency

Management Agency's experiences during the extensive flooding in Midwestern states, Roberson said after attending a state workshop on changes in the insurance program.

Each "crest" of a flood is considered a separate event and rivers were cresting more than once as heavy rains continued for days and weeks across the region. Property owners were buying insurance after having already sustained property damage, then claiming the damage was caused by a later flood crest.

Among other noteworthy changes:

■ the Upton-Jones Act will be "sunsetted" one year after the bill's signing. The act, heavily

used in North Carolina coastal communities, provides federal funds to either tear down or relocate structures "imminently threatened" by erosion. During its last year Upton-Jones will become part of a mitigation program administered by local governments.

■ a rider will be available, for the first time, to cover the cost of bringing a structure into building code compliance when repairing storm damage. Code compliance is required by law when repairing a structure that sustains 50 percent or more damage.

■ disaster relief assistance for uninsured property won't be available for the first \$500,000 in value.

## OIB Board Eyes 'Pooper-Scooper' Rule

Dog owners who walk their pets at Ocean Isle Beach may soon be required to take along a "pooper-scooper" to remove any waste left along the way.

Responding to complaints from summer visitors and permanent residents, Ocean Isle Beach Commissioners are taking a fresh look at the town's leash law. One of the changes contemplated is the addition of language that makes it the responsibility of the "owner, keeper or custodian" of any dog "to remove any feces deposited" by the dog on public property or on private property without appropriate consent.

Commissioner Bill Benton also wants the board to re-

visit a portion of the ordinance that bans dogs from public accesses and public parking areas.

"If you want to walk your dog on the beach, how are you supposed to get it there?" he asked.

The town requires all dogs to be on a leash whenever they are off the premises of the owner, whether on the beach or somewhere else in town. Also no dogs are permitted on the beach strand between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. from Memorial Day through Labor Day, whether or not they are leashed. Aid dogs are exempted while assisting a blind person.

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## Explore Lake Waccamaw With Experts

Visitors will get an opportunity to learn more about the setting of one of North Carolina's newest state parks at a workshop called "Exploring Lake Waccamaw State Park."

The state park is on the east side of Lake Waccamaw in Columbus County, about an hour's drive from Shallotte.

The Sept. 23-24 program is sponsored by a number of local individuals and organizations, including Friends of Lake Waccamaw State Park and the North Carolina Lake Management Society.

Friday evening, meeting at Lake Waccamaw United Methodist Church, Park Ranger Harry Lee Edwards will discuss the history of

the park and Hugh Porter, curator of mollusk collections for the UNC-Chapel Hill Institute of Marine Sciences, will discuss the mollusks found in the park, including several rare species.

Four more educational talks are planned Saturday morning by experts in their fields, followed by a choice of afternoon outings. Discussion topics include the lake's biological and physical characteristics; its natural history; plants and animals found within the park's confines; and state, local and federal efforts to address water quality concerns.

Field trip options include a 'gator search, mussel identification (mask and snorkel required), a hike, a lake tour by boat, and algae identification.

Cost is \$18 per person and includes refreshments and Saturday dinner.

For more information contact Deborah Kelso at 910-646-3813, or Bryn Tracy, 919-779-7575.

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