

Local fisherman outlines harbor concerns

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Randy Smith owns and captains the MISTASEA, a fishing vessel moored in the Crescent City Harbor.

As sometimes happens, Smith encountered a mechanical breakdown while crabbing, three weeks ago. Apparently, The MISTASEA lost rudder control and possibly broke the drive shaft. Smith needed immediate assistance.

With the help of his brother crabbers, Fashion Blacksmith, and several very knowledgeable marine diver experts, Smith was able to ease his vessel back into the Harbor; that's the good news. Gratitude and thanks offered to all who helped the Mistasea.

After accessing the inner basin to evaluate the extent of the rudder/shaft damage, Smith said The Mistasea was unable to be lifted onto the excavator at Fashion Blacksmith pier because of the tide level, and the buildup of mud and sludge due to zero dredging since 2013 allowed this immediate crisis to escalate.

The hero group of Smith's friends eased the vessel on to an adjoining public pier and with the knowledge and assistance of Fashion Blacksmith, expert divers utilizing giant air balloons managed to lift the stern out of the water.

Five days later, temporary but expensive, repairs were made allowing Smith and staff to be safely seaworthy. A typical catch on the open season brings in about \$12,000 in crab daily, according to Smith.

Smith said had he waited for the perfect high-tide and absence of any wind to lift the vessel on to the Fashion Blacksmith pier, he would have experienced a two-week delay.

The future for commercial fisherman in Crescent City is not bright, according to Smith.

“This is dismal and devastating news for those who helped build this community,” he said.

Smith outlined his concerns:

- Lack of dredging has led to a loss of places to unload and the ability to haul out.
- Repairs for all vessels will be done elsewhere at a greater cost to fishermen. Economic impact is a serious negative. Money leaves the community with greater risk to lives and vessels.
- There are no long-term infrastructure projects needed by the fishermen, planned; this includes the fuel dock and processors of places to unload. Long-term leases are going to Harbor tenants not related to commercial fishing.
- Without long-term leases, operators (businesses) will not invest in the Harbor, in either infrastructure or equipment, without the ability to recoup costs and make a profit.
- Due to lack of dredging, valuable permits were lost during the period from 2018-2020.
- The Coast Guard has vacated its presence and fellow fishermen must support each other, in emergencies.
- The Harbor did not assist commercial fishermen in obtaining Marine Stewardship Council certification for processing shrimp. This oversight caused a lack of revenue picked up by Oregon and Washington, affecting federal grants.

In a recent Pilot interview, Harbormaster Tim Petrick said that the State Water Board will approve the soil spoils for beneficial reuse.

"The soil reuse needs an approved permitted project before approving the beneficial soil re-use," Petrick said.

The Army Corps of Engineers plans to dredge the Federal Channel in the summer of 2024.