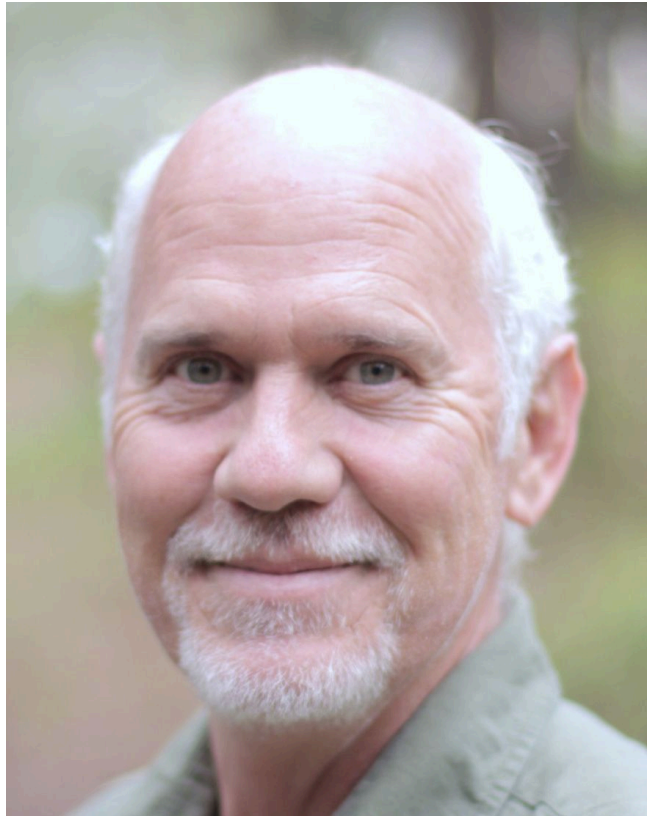


In My View: To Dredge or Not To Dredge? That is the question

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There was an article in the TriPLICATE last week related to harbor dredging that provided a skewed perspective from a single source. I can provide a broader context for this story.

I attended the Harbor District meeting (3/7/23) which had an informative discussion of harbor dredging. I was the only member of the public there.

This was a first for me. Usually, several other people and occasionally a TriPLICATE reporter attend.

At the meeting one of the Commissioners asked the Harbor Master for advice on how to explain what is going on with harbor dredging. The ensuing discussion helped me to understand more clearly what is and what is not being done to keep the harbor dredged.

The Harbor Master explained that there are essentially two dredging projects. The project that is taking an inordinate amount of Harbor District resources is dealing with all the issues related to dredging near Fashion

Blacksmith. The larger priority is planning for the routine dredging of the rest of the harbor.

Coordinating with multiple state and federal agencies to secure dredging permits is an expensive and time-consuming process. Delayed dredging permits are an issue all down the California Coast.

Planning Ahead

The current board and staff have been taking steps to get ahead of the planning curve by taking a few prudent steps. They recently completed a bathymetric study of the harbor bottom. Using high-tech imaging they produced a digital 3D model of the harbor showing the depth to bedrock (20-25 feet) and the amount of sediment on top of that.

This new data will serve several purposes. First, they can see with certainty that the siltation in most parts of the harbor is not above manageable expectations. It is not possible to dredge below bedrock, so there is a fixed limit on how deep they can go. For this reason, this will always be primarily a small boat harbor.

The second reason for completing a bathymetric study every year is that it will create a record to monitor how fast the siltation is occurring.

Armed with this information it is possible to plan into the future for when dredging will be needed. With this extra planning time, permits can be acquired before they are needed.

The third value gained from this harbor study is the ability to identify whether the removal of the Klamath Dams will result in excess siltation in the harbor. The dam removal project has allocated mitigation funds that could compensate the harbor, but it will be important to be able to quantify the impact.

All in all, the Harbor Commissioners and staff are making good progress. Nevertheless, they must still deal with festering problems from the past.

Pending Litigation

Fashion Blacksmith has filed a lawsuit against the Harbor District alleging that the District has failed to maintain dredging near the lift that pulls boats out of the water.

It is difficult to get any information on this from the Harbor District because of the pending litigation. All discussions have been held in closed session.

Fashion Blacksmith holds a lease with the Harbor District to operate a boat repair business. While this type of service is essential for a working harbor, this current lease is a money loser for the Harbor District.

It costs the Harbor District more to maintain the lease than they collect in lease fees. A case can be made that the Harbor District should subsidize this business for the benefit of the local fishing fleet, but then who will pay the subsidy?

I have been able to glean a few salient points related to this impasse. I understand that the silt in the harbor near Fashion Blacksmith potentially has a higher level of contaminants when compared to the rest of the

harbor.

Overall, our harbor is relatively clean. However, due to the ongoing business activities of this shipyard, there is an increased possibility for toxic run off. The harbor has completed testing of the silt near Fashion Blacksmith and if these tests show elevated levels of toxic metals or other chemicals, then this will make dredging in this area even more difficult and expensive.

Where Will It Go?

The complicated part about dredging is not just sucking it up. The more challenging part of dredging is where to put it down. The harbor has dredge settling ponds which are used to dewater newly dredged material. Unfortunately, these dredge ponds are full from the last dredging operation.

There are approximately 90,000 cubic yards of old dredge material that needs to be moved before new dredging can commence.

But first this material must be tested for any unacceptable levels of chemical contamination that would limit its use.

The Harbor staff reported that the stored dredge material tests relatively clean and would be safe to use for landscaping and other beneficial uses.

The Harbor is also conducting compaction testing on the dredge spoils. If these tests demonstrate a high level of compaction, then this material can be used for construction and significantly adds value to the product.

These are the steps that must be completed prior to emptying the dredge ponds. Once testing is completed, the US Army Corps of Engineers is committed to pay to haul 52,000 cubic yards. There are also local businesses interested in hauling this product for local projects.

In the end, the harbor may be able to have these dredge materials hauled away for little or no cost.

Making Progress

Consider this information the next time somebody criticizes the Harbor District for doing nothing.

The Harbor District is making great strides toward maintaining and dredging the harbor.

They have secured nearly 8 million dollars in grant funding to pay for reconstruction of the harbor infrastructure, including improved hoists for the fishermen to unload their catch.

That's not nothing.

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