



THE COLUMBIA RIVER CHANNEL DEEPENING PROJECT

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why is maintaining a viable navigation channel important to the Northwest?

- If the channel is not deepened, the regional economy will wither.
- Close to 1,500 Portland businesses and 40,000 regional jobs depend on seaport activity on the lower Columbia River. Last year, marine activity in the lower Columbia River created \$1.8 billion in personal income.
- \$14 billion in goods flow up and down the Columbia River every year.
- The project is jointly sponsored by the ports of Portland and St. Helens, Oregon, and the ports of Longview, Kalama, Woodland and Vancouver, Washington.

Why did NMFS withdraw their Biological Opinion?

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) issued a No-Jeopardy Biological Opinion for the Channel Improvement Project in December 1999. US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) also issued a No-Jeopardy Biological Opinion for terrestrial species in December 1999. NMFS withdrew their Opinion in August 2000, citing new information regarding: impacts of bathymetry (water depths) and flow on estuarine habitat; and resuspension of toxics. USFWS's 1999 Biological Opinion for terrestrial species remained valid. Subsequently, USFWS was given responsibility for the Bull Trout and the Coastal Cutthroat trout.

Because a Biological Opinion which meets ESA requirements must be in place before the project can proceed, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), USFWS and NMFS began a reconsultation process to resolve issues connected with the project. The result is the Biological Assessment issued in January and the NMFS Biological Opinion and USFWS Conference Opinion released this month (May 2002).

Will the Columbia River channel deepening project impact endangered fish?

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) have issued their "no jeopardy" Biological Opinion, in essence, saying no, the project will not jeopardize endangered fish.

During a six-month public process conducted last year by the Corps, NMFS, USFW and the sponsor ports, an independent scientific panel of nationally known ecosystem experts appointed by Sustainable Ecosystems Institute convened to review the environmental and technical issues associated with the project. The group established the best available science by which the channel deepening project should be measured and that it would have no measurable effect on endangered fish.

Will disposal of dredged sand affect wildlife habitats and agricultural lands?

- About two-thirds of the sand removed from the channel will be deposited upland to avoid impacting fish and their habitat. For every upland acre impacted by the project, on average two acres of wetlands or riparian areas will be created or improved to mitigate impacts.
- Sand disposal sites were reviewed as part of the National Environmental Policy Act Environmental Impact Statement and Feasibility Study completed in 1999. More than four out of every five acres proposed for sand disposal have been used in the past for maintenance of the existing navigation channel.

Will dredging release toxins that will affect water quality?

- No, an independent panel of scientists of national prominence concluded that the material that would be dredged is coarse, clean sand, which is continuously moving in sand waves, preventing contamination from staying on it. (Full results of Sustainable Ecosystems Institute panel can be found at <http://www.sei.org/columbia/home.html>.)
- The coarse grained sand of the channel has been tested for nearly 20 years and continues to meet or exceed EPA standards. In fact, sand dredged from the Columbia River navigation channel is used to make concrete and asphalt, to place in golf courses, and in commercial water filtration systems. Revenue from sale of sand goes to the Oregon Common Schools Fund and Washington's Department of Natural Resources.

How much of the Columbia River will be deepened in the proposed project?

About 3.5 percent of the Columbia River from its mouth to Portland/Vancouver will be deepened. Many portions of the 600 ft. wide channel are already more than 43 feet deep, so the dredging project actually just "tops" some of the sand "waves" created by the strong currents of the Columbia in areas of the channel.

What about the Willamette? What impact will the Superfund designation have on the project?

The Corps and the sponsor ports agreed to take out the Willamette River portion of the project until an approved cleanup plan is in place for the Portland Harbor superfund site.

Is 43 feet deep enough?

- The six sponsor ports asked Congress to limit the Corps' channel deepening study to 43-feet because this depth meets the needs of both grain and container ships for the next 20 years and it also accommodates the size of ships that can transit the Panama Canal.
- This project is designed to preserve the Columbia River's niche of providing competitive direct service for regional shippers.
- Grain and other bulk ships can more economically load in a 43-foot channel.
- Container ships that require more than 43 feet when fully loaded generally call on major ports such as Hong Kong and Los Angeles. They are unlikely to call at a regional port like Portland, even if the channel were deepened to 45 feet, because they depend on a balance of exports and imports, and imports are targeted more for major population centers.

What alternatives were considered when considering deepening the channel?

Option A: DO NOT deepen the channel

- Without channel deepening, the new, larger, more fuel efficient ships will not call on the Columbia River, and local businesses will most likely be forced to truck or rail their cargo to Seattle, Tacoma, or California. The higher cost of doing that will hurt the ability of our region's importers and exporters to reach world markets, and have the most impact on Oregon farmers and timber products.
- The greater use of rail and trucks will further strain road and rail systems and increase congestion.

Option B: River Level Reporting and Forecasting System, a.k.a. LOADMAX.

- The project's initial feasibility study determined that theoretical improvements to LOADMAX -- a planning tool that helps river pilots and ship captains set departure times and speeds to take advantage of tides and fresh water flows -- would only result in a small fraction of the benefit derived from a 43-foot channel.

Option C: Develop Down River Ports like Astoria

- The costs of closing existing ports and building new port facilities and road and rail transportation systems to Astoria were found to be much higher than the cost of channel deepening. For example, the cost to develop a new container terminal along the lower Columbia River would be approximately twice as much as deepening the channel. This does not include the cost of developing multiple new bulk grain and mineral handling terminals.
- Two other alternatives involving the construction of "topping off" facilities were also examined and rejected for the same reasons.
- Infrastructure development at a down river port like Astoria (e.g. marine terminal, container facility construction, road and rail connections) would require parts of the Lower Columbia River Estuary to be filled. The acreage for just one mineral bulk facility would require about 150 acres -- approximately the size of downtown Astoria -- land which Astoria does not have available.

What is "Plan B" if the channel is not deepened?

- Over time, if the channel is not deepened, international maritime business will decrease due to draft constraints and the Northwest region's connection to global markets will diminish -- affecting our economy, jobs and quality of life. Most affected by the loss of deep-draft vessel calls would be businesses and workers dependent on containers, grain farming, shipping, and bulk industries.
- The sponsor ports will continue their mission to provide international maritime market service, and will maintain responsibility for taking the long view in planning facilities and transportation access.
- The sponsor ports will remain active proponents for waterborne navigation for the Columbia River region and continue to strongly advocate for improved freight mobility for the region, whether it be by ocean-going vessel, barge, truck or train.
- The Port of Portland has included a scenario in our current marine terminals planning process that considers the repercussions of being limited by a 40-foot channel.

What is the earliest possible start date? What happens first and where does monitoring and restoration fit in?

The six Oregon & Washington sponsoring ports of the Columbia River Channel Deepening project have an appropriations request before the U.S. Congress for \$11.5 million, which would be used to begin restoration first. The Corps and ports estimate the earliest this could start is Spring 2003, assuming legal challenges to the Biological Opinion or the project itself don't result in court-ordered injunctions which would delay starting the project while litigation is resolved. Construction of the navigation features could begin as early as Spring 2004.

If construction of the ecosystem restoration features begins in Spring 2003, it will be funded with the money appropriated by Congress for FY 2003 and a portion of the \$55.4 million appropriated by the Oregon and Washington State legislatures.

What regulatory approvals are still pending? Is there an opportunity for the public to comment?

Yes, there are still several steps before the project can receive a Record of Decision from the Army Corps of Engineers, including:

- Corps' Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) and economic analysis – Public comment period summer 2002
- State of Oregon water quality certification
- State of Washington water quality certification
- Oregon Coastal Zone Management Act certifications
- Washington Coastal Zone Management Act certifications
- Site permits from Oregon and Washington

For public meeting schedules and more information, visit the Port of Portland's website at www.portofportland.com or www.channeldeepening.com.