

St. Petersburg Times
February 17, 2003 Monday

Corps of Engineers is best bet for dredging project

Editor: Re: Channel dredging project is a fiasco, Feb. 9 letter to the editor:

Albert Lyons tries to justify our walking away from the Army Corps of Engineers for the channel dredging project, but with a couple of errors:

First, the maintenance would be the responsibility of the Corps of Engineers and not the U.S. Coast Guard. The Coast Guard would be responsible only for marking.

Second, there is no one in county government with qualifications to manage a dredging project, as was proven with the Bayport Channel project.

I have a master's of science degree in geodetic science, was first in the group in the United States certified by the American **Congress** on Surveying and Mapping in 1984 as a hydrographic surveyor, and was employed in that field for 20 years, with the majority of contracts being pre-dredge and post-dredge surveys for the **Army Corps of Engineers**.

Shortly after the Bayport project was paid off, I decided to go into Bayport sightseeing, with a boat drawing 27 inches, and fetched up on a sizable rock in mid-channel, suffering considerable damage to the boat. With my background, I decided to look into the situation and asked to see the project drawings of the dredging and survey work.

I was not shown a pre-dredge survey, but the post-dredge survey record was quite revealing. Upon completion of dredging, the dredger was contracted to conduct a post-dredge survey (requiring the fox go into the hen house), for which he conducted cross-channel profiles every 500 to 750 feet and did not conduct a channel center profile.

These profiles displayed a very irregular pattern of cross-section profiles, as opposed to a regular profile with constant slope patterns on either side of the channel, and obviously precluded the discovery of any shoal areas remaining, such as the rock I found.

Standard dredging procedures require the completion of pre-dredge and post-dredge profiles every 50 or 100 feet, as well as at least one channel center profile to tie all information together. These survey records are then processed to determine the volume of actual material removed by dredging, which controls the amount paid the dredger. Also, these surveys and the analysis must be conducted by a qualified survey firm not connected with the dredger. When I asked people connected with this contract, I was told the presence of the rock was known, but the county administration was directed by a commissioner to let it go and pay off the dredger.

Further, "walking away from the Corps" would not save the county money. If you remember, the project cost ballooned by about \$2-million when the Corps found out all of the steps to satisfy environmental requirements, which increased the county portion by a like amount. Thus, if we decide to go it alone, this same environmental cost will apply, as well as the some \$800,000 we have paid to the Corps, plus dredging and survey costs, if we are to manage it intelligently.

That means the county would be out \$2.8-million, plus dredging and survey costs of \$1-million to \$2-million on their own, as opposed to just \$2.8-million payable to the Corps for a properly done project and perpetual maintenance.

I think the choice is a no-brainer.

C.F. Willett
Spring Hill