

THE AMERICAN WATERWAY MAINTENANCE AND COASTAL DEFENSES ACT



The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is responsible for maintaining 12,000 miles of inland and intracoastal waterways, 180 ports, and 95,471 miles of shoreline with a fleet of just 4 publicly owned (mothballed) hopper dredge vessels and 15 privately held vessels.

THE POLICY

The American Waterway Maintenance and Coastal Defenses Act directs the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to design, build, staff and maintain a publicly owned U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredge fleet. The Water & Coast Act will provide a statutory requirement to update and replace vessels within the fleet on a routine and predictable schedule. The contracts for construction of new government vessels will be distributed between regional union shipyards to improve local capacity and reduce mobilization costs (East Coast, Great Lakes, Gulf Coast, and West Coast). The new public dredge fleet and support vessels will be docked and maintained regionally.

The Water & Coast Act will provide a statutory requirement to maintain a minimum depth for ports and authorizes yearly expenditures from the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund to maintain those port depths. The Water & Coast Act will also create a statutory requirement to nourish beaches and coastal wetlands by a minimum cubic yardage per year.

THE PEOPLE

The construction of and maintenance of a national dredge fleet will create thousands of good union shipyard jobs throughout the United States. American

mariners will be needed to crew both the ocean going and inland public dredge fleets.

(Continued) The current four dredge vessels maintained by the United States are in ready reserve status each employing a rotating civilian crew of a few dozen mariners performing supporting emergency and defense dredging and inland navigation work on a part-time basis. Built decades ago, the surviving remains of the American dredge fleet is technologically outdated and small relative to global standards. New generation vessels working full-time to keep American waterways and ports accessible and protect coastal communities will provide good union civilian jobs nationally.

THE PROBLEM

As any Port Director or inland barge company can attest, water infrastructure maintenance funding happens in fits and unpredictable bursts. The Water Resources Development Bill is the occasional omnibus bill in which much of this work is authorized, but the funds are only later appropriated by a separate congressional committee process. It turns a routine maintenance budget issue into a clumsy and partisan circus that pits Corps District against Corps District and American city against American city.



Julie Dermansky Photography



(Continued) Recently the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers stitched back together two pieces of Alabama’s Ship Island using dredged sand from the Gulf of Mexico. The project was divided into multiple, equal phases. In a span of 18 months, with the same pool of bidders, the price had increased by a whopping 50%. The phases were virtually identical.

Without its own fleet, the Corps is completely dependent on those 15 privately held dredgers. This imposes serious planning challenges. Justin S. McDonald, Coastal Resiliency Program Manager at the Mobile District, recently explained that the Corps

“ spend[s] a lot of time thinking when we put projects out and what our acquisition strategies are to not burden other parts of the mission. We start bidding against ourselves. We spend a lot of our time coordinating acquisition. ”

AT A GLANCE

Since the 1960s, the private dredging industry has fought a relentless war against the American people’s right to our own public dredge fleet. The American Waterway Maintenance and Coastal Defenses Act will repeal the following restrictions:

- The **Minimum Fleet Legislation Public Law 95-269 of April 26, 1978**: the USACE can only utilize its own fleet only when a private bid exceeds the government bid by 25 percent.
- The **Oceans Act of 1992**: restricts the USACE hopper dredge fleet from an annual schedule of 230 work days to about 180 workdays. The 1992 bill also places the Wheeler on 55 workdays per year plus emergencies schedule (ready-reserve status).
- The **Water Resources Act and Development Act 1993**: 7.5 million cubic yards of work currently performed by Corps’ dredgers must instead be opened for bids.
- The **Water Resources and Development Act of 1996** limits active Corps hopper dredge vessels to no more work than the average assigned to the past three fiscal years.
- The **Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act of 2002** limits the Corps hopper dredge McFarland to 85 days of work.
- The **Water Resources Development Act 2007** placed McFarland in ready reserve status.