



Publisher's Notebook

Matt Winters • July 2022

Coast Guard makes a vital investment in our future

There can be no better news for our area than what we learned last week: That the U.S. Coast Guard is making a large investment in expanding the old Navy base at Tongue Point to be home port for two new fast response cutters. The first of these is set to arrive in the spring of 2024.

A good-sized part of the \$30 million contract for this Tongue Point work will bolster the local economy, even though a California company will be the lead contractor. That much money can't help but bolster the bottom line for everything from espresso stands to subcontractors. It will add to the millions Coast Guard Sector Columbia River already spends here each year on payroll and nearly countless economic transactions with businesses.

The Coast Guard's vote of confidence in Tongue Point sends a powerful message to potential private investors, who are likely to also benefit from the extensive dredging that is part of the contract.

The biggest thing the Coast Guard does for our economy and soci-

ety is ensure safe maritime operations. It's nearly impossible to imagine how commercial and recreational fishing would be possible without their diligent protection. This also goes for the large oceangoing passenger and cargo vessels that use local waters. Famously adept, the Coast Guard is essential.

Our company has long advocated for the Coast Guard in all our Clatsop and Pacific county publications, realizing that we're nowhere without them. When Congress authorized the fast response cutter program, we joined with political and civic leaders to win the home port selection process. The Tongue Point contract turns the basing decision from a hypothetical advantage into a real one.

Astoria Mayor Bruce Jones, a former commander of Sector Columbia River, astutely summarized what this means. "The city of Astoria is very excited to have this increased Coast Guard presence ... It contributes to the local economy significantly, so having new cutters, plus the crews, plus the maintenance assist team, a new dock and all the

supporting infrastructure — it's going to be a tremendous boost to our community economically, as well as just a great asset for our overall maritime economy."

As others including U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley and U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici have urged, the next logical step will be to station up to two more fast response cutters here in the Columbia River. Even more important would be a decision to base two new 360-foot offshore patrol cutters here. This primarily makes sense from a logistical standpoint, as the mouth of the Columbia River is strategically placed to permit quick access to the north, south and west, as needed. This port decision would also maintain and perhaps even expand the total Coast Guard presence here after the proud but aged 1960s-era medium endurance cutters Alert and Steadfast are phased out.

We're proud of the Coast Guard. We're grateful for their continuing belief in this place and for the investments that come with it.



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