

# Columbia River Dredging Project Digs Up Co

## Dredging continued from front page

participated in technical consultations, and since then, the views of these Tribes have emerged through the work of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC) representing these four Tribes.

"The CRITFC Tribes are strongly opposed to lower Columbia River dredging," reported Charles Hudson, spokesman for the Commission, by email. "We oppose the project on scientific grounds that the action will have a significant detrimental effect on juvenile salmonids in a critical life stage, the estuary rearing stage."

"All (Tribes) were concerned about water quality, the fish runs, the project interfering with fish runs, and the harvest, if it would impede that," said Linda Walker, Tribal Liaison for the Portland office of the Corps.

"From a cultural perspective, the comments were very minimal," said Walker. "They (Tribes) wanted to make sure we had inventoried where dredge material would be deposited. The majority (of Tribal cultural sites) are protected."

Although cultural specialists counsel against revealing exact numbers or placement of Indian cultural sites, a variety of sources have estimated that there could be hundreds of such sites along the 106-mile stretch of the river where the dredging is slated to take place.

The project as proposed will deepen the Columbia River by three feet from the ocean on the west to the Port of Portland and the Port of Vancouver on the east. It will cost \$134 million dollars paid roughly 65-percent by the federal government and 35-percent split evenly by the states of Oregon and Washington (\$27.5 million each). The project proposal has been sweetened by the inclusion of a variety of eco-system improvements, though there is disagreement about whether the proposals will actually result in improvements.

Environmentalists, fishing associations and even the Port of Astoria oppose the effort.

"The dredging plan threatens 13 stocks of ESA-listed salmon as well as the Northwest's most productive Dungeness crab nursery," according to a web report from the Institute for Fisheries Resources and the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations. "The dredging program has been vigorously opposed by the Port of Astoria, Salmon for All, and both salmon and crab fishermen."

Still, \$14 billion worth of business floats up and down the river each year, said the Port of Portland's dredging project spokeswoman, Elisa Dozono. Forty thousand jobs and 1,000 companies depend on the industry, jobs earning an average of \$46,000 annually, she added. The real issue is whether the grain growers, lumber mills and other shipping reliant companies inland are going to be able to hold on to market share without the project, she said.

"We have more than a thousand growers and manufacturers in this region who rely on the Columbia channel for affordable access to global markets," said Oregon House Democratic Whip Mark Hass (D-Raleigh Hills) in a recent press release, "and we would do them a great disservice by weakening their ability to compete in those markets."

The benefits are based on the in-

creased loads that ships will be able to haul out of the Portland market. Eighty-percent of the transPacific fleet is constrained by the 40-foot deep channel, said Dozono. "At 43 feet, 35-40-percent would be constrained. Being constrained doesn't mean they won't call, just that they cannot fully utilize the channel. For example,

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Hyundai and Hanjin already use 43-foot ships here, but as a result, are forced to lightload on a regular basis."

The project will return \$18.8 million per year over 50 years for "a benefit of \$1.71 for every dollar spent during construction," according to the message from the Commander and District Engineer, Col. Richard Hoberniet on the Corps' webpage. And because the Corps is only figur-

"What we get is dredge-material dumpsites in our backyards that impact our economy," according to Matthew Van Ess, Director of the Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce (CREST), a council of 13 government agencies at the mouth of the Columbia, on a website called, *Tide-Pool*. "We may get trickle-down benefits of the overall impact of deepening - simi-

ports." A knowledgeable industry source who declined to speak on the record said that inland shippers who can "get a better rate per ton" may be the project's principle beneficiaries. "Portland is a bit player with no long term container contracts. There is very little economic incentive for the project as a whole."

"There are numerous benefits," said the Corps' Rabe. "In addition to shipping, there are improvements to the eco-system: improving salmon habitat, taking actions that will reconnect waterways to the Columbia that have been cut off for decades, actions that could result in the delisting of the Columbian Whitetail deer, various environmental benefits associated with this project that get lost in the economic analyses."

"These restoration actions are not project mitigation but rather additional opportunities to benefit threatened and endangered species in the Columbia River basin," according to Anne Badgley, Director of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's (USFW) six-state Pacific Region.

However, in Clatsop County, "The Corps of Engineers' plan to dispose of materials in one of our prime fishing areas is one of the prime concerns of ours," according to Jim Azumano, Clatsop County Administrator. "We have a Goal 16 to recognize and protect the unique environmental, economic and social values of each estuary and associated wetlands... The Corps' in-water disposal site at the Lois-Mott Embayment would be inconsistent to the policy. It would reduce the number of gil-net fishermen in that area."

Because of the reticence of Clatsop County to go along with the project, Governor Ted Kulongoski recently proposed relocating the eco-restoration projects (or dumpsites) and an existing salmon nursery, none of which has convinced the local community.

Although the Corps position is currently firm, according to Rabe, industry watchers recognize that the Seattle office of the Environmental Protection Agency is in the process of establishing a 50-year permit for a 14-square mile ocean site that the Corps could use, and into which the entire spoils of the Columbia Channel Deepening Project would be nothing but "a drop in the bucket," according to Van Ess, who sees the possibilities but is not in support of that option.

Tribes around the nation are fighting Corps dredging projects elsewhere in the country as well. The Redcliff Ojibwe and Bad River Ojibwe Tribes in Wisconsin are fighting the Corps over the Great Lakes Navigation Study, "a proposal," according to Leah Lapointe, Water Resources Program Manager for the Redcliff Ojibwes, "to open up all of the Great Lakes to these huge ships."

**History of the Project**

The Columbia River has a 128-year history of dredging. In the 1920s, the Army Corps of Engineers dug a channel 30 feet deep. In 1935, it was deepened to 35 feet. The most recent operation, in 1976, deepened the channel to its current 40-foot depth, according to Corps documents. A 14-year effort may soon take another three feet from the bottom of the channel for the 106 miles from the mouth of the river to the Port of Portland on the Oregon

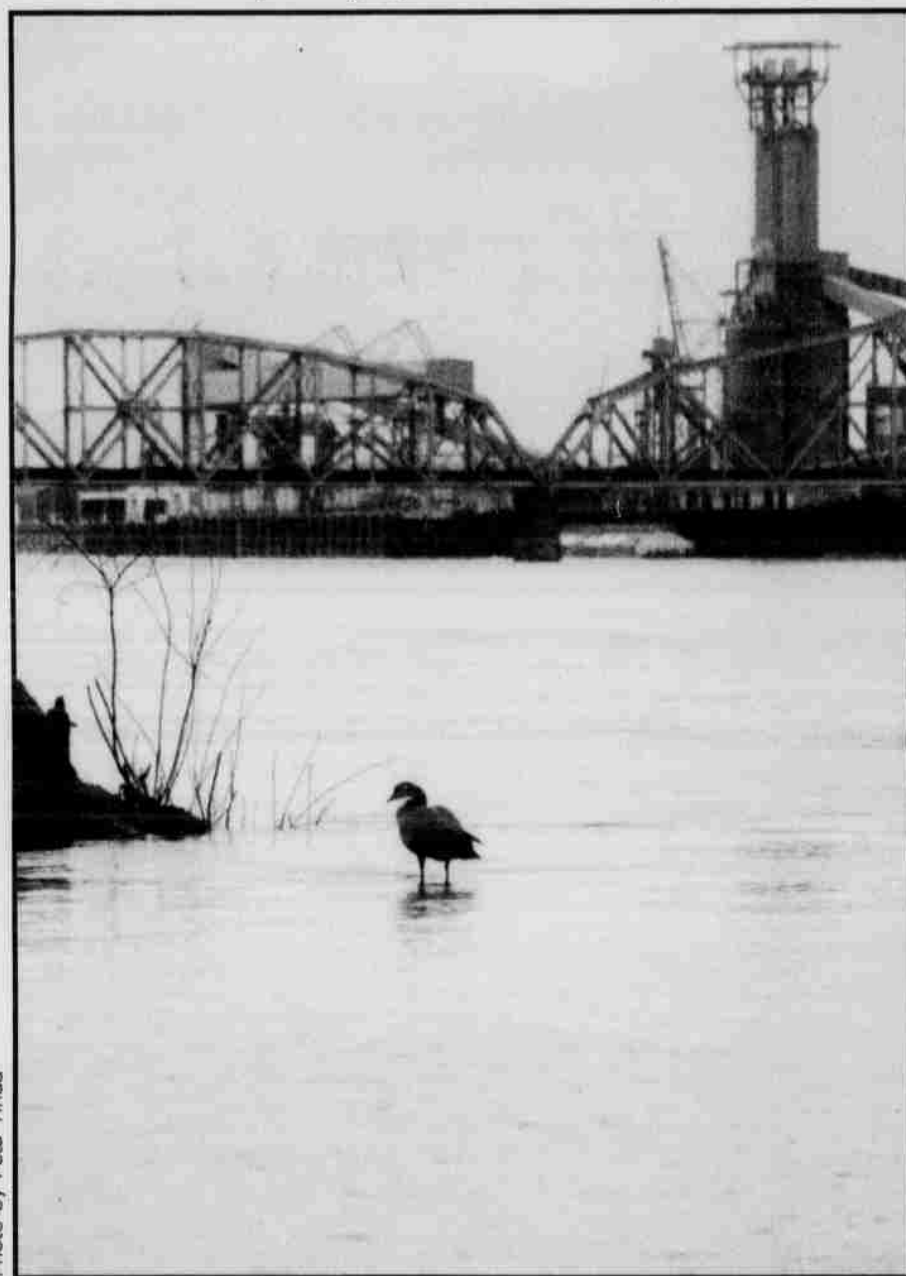


Photo by Peta Tinda

ing federal expenses and benefits, they "don't fully demonstrate the impact of the regional economy."

Some of this impact may not be for the better, opponents say. What the Corps sees as "eco-restoration," opponents call dumpsites. And for a very sound reason. Regulations covering the "eco-restoration" or "dump" sites allow eco-restoration but do not allow dredge spoils dumping.

The plan calls for dredge spoils to create 191 acres of tidal marsh at Lois and Mott islands, 20 miles up the river. For Miller Sands and Pillar Rock islands, 30 miles up the river, the plans call for dredge spoils to fill in 235 acres of tidal marsh and flats habitat. All of these islands were initially made with previous dredge project spoils.

oppose it." The Port of Astoria does not compete with the Port of Portland, according to Gearin. "We have not had any deep draft vessel cargo since 1996," he said.

Experts don't see eye-to-eye on the economics, either. "Our feeling is that Portland is a challenged Port even with a deepened channel," reported CRITFC's Hudson. "The deeper draft container vessels make their profits when they're in the high seas shipping lanes, not 110 miles up a river system when there are other deep water ports in the vicinity - Tacoma, Seattle, Port Angeles, Oakland, Long Beach. I've talked to some timber industry exporters who say it's more profitable for them to transport goods by rail from the Willamette Valley to Puget Sound