

Ventura Harbor Stake-holder Communication

**By Nick Deitch
Chairman, Ventura Port District Commission**

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Faced with constricting Federal funding for our Harbor's waterways, the Ventura Port District commissioners made a painful decision to spend District funds to augment the federal government's dredging efforts of the entrance channel area. This is something we simply must do in the service of our public trust and stewardship of the Ventura Harbor; we want to reassure that the harbor entrance remains safe and navigable.

When it became evident that funding available to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the annual dredging project in the harbor would be insufficient to do a thorough job, the district was faced with a tough decision: Should we spend District funds to augment the dredging work being overseen by the Corps even though no emergency situation exists? After careful deliberation at a special public hearing, the Port Commission determined that financial intervention was necessary and appropriate in order to avoid a potential crisis at the harbor's entrance in the near future.

On March 1, commissioners voted unanimously to approve a lease of equipment and personnel from Manson Construction of Seattle to dredge some 300,000 cubic yards of sand from the sand trap immediately north of the Ventura Harbor entrance at a cost not to exceed \$1.5 million. This decision was made for the following reasons:

1. The sand trap is full – it has more than 632,000 cubic yards of sand -- and unless dredged, additional incoming sand would overflow to the harbor entrance, creating a hazard to navigation and potentially closing off the mouth of the harbor, which would significantly impact the commercial and recreational uses of the harbor.

2. Since Manson Construction is already at the harbor, dredging the entrance under contract from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, it made perfect sense to do additional dredging now, without facing future mobilization costs, which could represent a significant additional cost to the work.

3. Permitting for dredging at Ventura Harbor ends on March 30, so we had to act quickly.

4. Funding for the Corps of Engineers is sufficient to cover the costs of dredging only the entrance channel this year. To make matters worse, for the first time in almost 30 years, there is no funding in the President's 2013 budget for dredging at Ventura Harbor.

The recently completed harbor entrance dredging project by the Corps of Engineers removed 225,000 cubic yards of sand at a cost of \$2,228,000. Of that, \$1,225,000 was spent for mobilization of equipment. By comparison, the \$1.5 million project to be funded by the District is more cost-effective because the dredge is already in place at the harbor, thus obviating mobilization costs and resulting in significant cost savings to the District.

If the entrance becomes non-navigable, the large purse seine fishing fleet that generated revenues of \$22.8 million in 2011 from the 45,000 tons of squid landed in the harbor would be forced to abandon the harbor and likely not return. Businesses in the harbor would suffer and some might close. The fleet of more than 75 commercial fishing boats which include 35 purse seine vessels with a draft of 12' to 15' generates \$750,000 in slip fees annually to the Port District. In addition, the District collected \$208,000 from the commercial fishing industry for offloading fees at \$6.50 per ton. The District receives an additional \$116,000 in rent annually from two fish off-loading companies.

Simply stated, the commercial fishing industry's economic impact at Ventura Harbor is huge.

The Harbor is home to the headquarters of the Channel Islands National Park Service. The Visitor Center estimates over 300,000 visitors per year explore their exhibits and learn more about the Channel Islands. One of our major lessees, Island Packers, transports more than 60,000 visitors to the Channel Islands annually. In addition to Island Packers, our charter boat business includes sport fishing and dive boats, and collectively this business generates more than \$200,000 in rent annually to the District. And of course, the District supports a substantial community of recreational boaters, with more than 1,500 recreational boat slips that generate more than \$1.5 million in rent annually to the District.

Dredging is a crucial component to the Ventura Harbor Village as a seaside destination for domestic and international visitors to California and creates a vibrant harbor side atmosphere for over 35 visitor-serving businesses. The Ventura Harbor's recreational launch ramp makes daily boater travel in the Santa Barbara Channel to neighboring ports and to the Channel Islands National Park available to the public.

The Harbor is a significant economic driver for the City of Ventura, with the businesses in the harbor generating more than \$42 million in sales in 2011. It's imperative that we maintain a navigable entrance, and removing sand from the adjacent sand trap is critical.

This marks the first time the District has had to use its own funds for dredging in the entrance area because federal funding was insufficient to do a complete job. Federal funding has remained somewhat static while the cost of

dredging has continually risen. Whereas the current federal dredging project removed 225,000 cubic yards of sand, in 2007 more than twice as much sand -- 457,000 cubic yards -- was dredged for \$200,000 less.

We plan to concentrate our efforts to persuade the federal government that it should continue to provide funding for dredging at Ventura Harbor and hopefully at a greater level.

We feel it is important to be transparent about our decision-making and how we conduct the public's business. We strive to run the harbor in an efficient, safe and fiscally responsible manner so everyone can enjoy the bounty that our ocean and harbor offer.