



## County of Dare

### Office of the Board of Commissioners

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March 6, 2023

Dear, Senator Norman W. Sanderson, Co-Chair  
Representative Jimmy Dixon, Co-Chair  
Members, Environmental Review Commission

The economic impact of Oregon and Hatteras Inlet to Dare County is incredibly significant and far outweighs the costs necessary to keep the inlet passable. In fact, the annual economic impact to the Federal Government alone greatly exceeds the recent and historical annual expenditures for dredging.

Oregon Inlet has migrated southward, and its present location is now more than two miles from its original location. Being aware of the dangerous conditions for navigation through the inlet, Congress in 1950 authorized the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to maintain a 14-foot deep by 400-foot-wide channel through the ocean bar (PL 81-516).

The waterways of Hatteras Island are also vital natural, environmental, recreational, and commercial resources for the citizens and visitors of Dare County. Hatteras Island dredging projects include, but are not limited to: Sloops Channel, Big Foot Slough, Rollinson Channel, and Hatteras Terminal.

As a result of high uncertainty, both the commercial and recreational uses of the inlet have been diminished and a sizable portion of the region's commercial fleet has relocated to the Tidewater region in Virginia.

Due to the lack of shallow draft hopper dredges in the country, the USACE has been severely hampered to carry on a robust and consistent dredging program pursuant to federal authorization.

Dare County entered a public – private partnership with EJE Dredging with funds allocated by the State of North Carolina in a forgivable loan to help maintain navigable channels in Dare County waterways. Resulting in the Dredge MISS KATIE.

Obtaining the necessary permits for Maintenance dredging has been cumbersome. The Regulatory Reform Act of 2023 helped this process. However, the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), NC Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF) and Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) have at times come into conflict. Causing this process to be drawn out over several months. The permitting process for the waterway channels around Oregon Inlet started in August of 2022.

It is apparent neither of these agencies fully understand the measures of a routine Maintenance program. As for some examples in which common sense should and would prevail but is not observed.

1) USAC dredge plan has given Dare County and Miss Katie a dredge box to operate in on the bar at Oregon Inlet, that has a clear and well-known shipwreck (W.G. Townsend) in it. SHPO has placed a 150-foot buffer around the wreck and does not allow dredging of that area in the buffer zone. As such MISS KATIE would also be in violation of the CAMA permits. USAC navigational team has been standing fast on not moving the box as USAC has stated, it has deep water. However currently we are noting a shoal creeping in on the box beside the shipwreck. Dare County has reached out to SHPO to try to change or remove the buffer. The W.G. Townsend was a tug that sank in 1961 and in the 1980s a marine salvage contractor was charged with blasting it with TNT as it was causing a navigational hazard at the time. Possibly leaving a large debris field instead of a whole ship.

2) NC DMF is now requiring that a before and after Sub Aquatic Vegetation Survey be completed after every dredge event. The areas in which there are known Sub Aquatic Vegetation are outside of the Walter Slough channel going into Oregon Inlet Fishing Center. However, NC DMF has placed a 100-foot buffer zone around the SAVs in proximity of Walter Slough channel. The plan for MISS KATIE is to take a dredge run in the channel as she heads out to work in other areas. Thus, causing a swipe to be a dredge event and requiring the surveys. As this has been explained to NCDMF it is still unclear as to their stance on the frequency of the surveys.

3) The Wanchese Marine Industrial Park noted in a 9/28/23 survey of the channel Ranges 14, 14a, 14b, and 14c, leading into the park, were shoaling in, with depths of less than 4 feet in some areas. The park is home to 26 Marine businesses that employ close to 400 individuals and can generate an estimated annual impact of \$100 million to the economy. MISS KATIE is ready to work to clear this channel, as we sit waiting for permits.

To ensure the success of this joint effort, and that vessels are enabled to safely navigate the channels and inlets of Dare County free of burdensome regulations, any assistance you can offer would be appreciated.

Sincerely,

*Steve House*, Dare County Commissioner

Chair - Oregon Inlet Task Force

Chair - Dare County Working Watermans Commission