

6/28/2006 10:26:00 AM

Bridgehaven dredging mired in paperwork

By Susan Colby,
Leader
Contributing Writer

Dan Jones is frustrated.

As he looks at the meager trickle of water running out into Hood Canal, he sighs. For more than four years, Jones, as vice president of the Bridgehaven Community Club Association, has been trying to get a permit to dredge the entry channel and marina at Bridgehaven.

Tucked into the shores of Hood Canal south of the floating bridge, the private marina off South Point Road is a little-known gem. With 20 slips and a boat launch, it protects the

entrance of a channel lined on the east side with homes and 26 docks, and on the west side with natural vegetation where otters and coyotes co-exist. Overhead, it's not uncommon to see eagles and osprey soaring or being chased by gulls and crows.



Bridgehaven residents Marti and Dave Mathis find that even in their small rowboat, the water in the marina and channel can be too low to get their craft out to Hood Canal. – Photo by Susan Colby

The only problem for the boat-loving residents is a silted-in marina entrance.

Last Friday, June 23, there was a glimmer of hope for Jones that his persistence was paying off. After all these years, most of the obstacles appeared to have been removed and the way forward was opening up.

Jones took over the lead on the project in January 2002. In a purely volunteer position, he picked up the few pieces left behind by his three predecessors. At that time, the dredging application to the Army Corps of Engineers, made in 1998, was stalled, mired in red tape.

The application, called the Joint Aquatic Resource Permits Application, is a multi-pronged instrument that must first pass through Corps hands. It is an alphabet soup of governmental approvals and agencies including hydraulic project approvals, shoreline management permits, water quality certifications from the Department of Ecology, and U.S. [Department of Fish and Wildlife](#), not to mention biological assessments and geological surveys.

However, before it can be pass through “the services,” namely WDFW, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Endangered Species Act, it is published for public comment.

Sand dumping

The initial proposal met resistance from a variety of sources, including the North Olympic Salmon Coalition (NOSC) and two Indian tribes, the S’Klallam and Point No Point Treaty. Their main objection was the sand dumping location.

In the course of the planning, a variety of dumpsites were offered. The initial plan was to dump the sand upland on a couple of vacant lots in Bridgehaven, which was revised to a site at the Shine Quarry north of nearby State Route 104. The next option was to dispose of the sand upstream at the old South Point Ferry Dock (to be used for passenger ferry service during the Hood Canal Bridge replacement project in 2009). But that idea was also nixed for a variety of reasons, one being that the sand would have simply been washed by the northern littoral drift right back to where it was dredged from, the channel and the Bridgehaven marina. While beach replenishment is optimum, this was not where the sand was wanted.

The optimum dumping location is to the north of the marina entrance on what’s known as the north sand island. Prior to the creation of the jetty, channel and marina in the mid-1960s, the sand was deposited there naturally.

Early in the process, Jones called the owners of the island, who said, “If you want to do that, you can buy it,” which took that option out of the equation.

The next option was to dump the sand in the deep-water disposal site north of Port

Townsend in the Strait of Juan de Fuca. And this is where the tribes and NOSC took exception. They were concerned that the additional sand in the currents would disrupt the natural cycles of the fish and other wildlife. They suggest to Jones that the sand be dumped on the north sand island.

“They didn’t know we had already tried to get permission,” Jones commented. “So I tried one more time and discovered that the island had recently been sold.”

His next phone call was to the new owners who live in Poulsbo, and they readily agreed.

This was the solution to the problem, or so he thought. It was what everybody agreed was the ideal situation. “You’d think that it would be really easy,” Jones said. Amy Leitman, the biologist who has been working on the project for five years, explained that this is the most “environmentally benign” solution.

Corps changes

But that was not the end of the effort. Although Jones had letters from all the parties who had objected and who now approved the dredging and deposit plan, the Army Corps of Engineers changed requirements.

“Every time we made a revision, the file got thicker and thicker,” Jones said.

Three months ago, the Corps informed him that the project file had become too unwieldy and incomprehensible, and it canceled the permit. When that Corps permit was canceled, so was the DOE permit. It meant that although some of the work would still be approved, a new biological evaluation and drawing of the island would be needed, along with current letters and inspections from the other agencies.

So for Jones, it was back to square one.

The Corps’ Beth Coffey, supervisor of the Bridgehaven project, said she would try “to push things through,” but time is again running out, as the environmental work window for the project is July through October. Coffey said the public comment period’s length would be reduced, as those approval letters from former complainants are still current. Dave Molenaar of WDFW has already approved the new site, and Greg Ballard of Jefferson County Community Development has also approved the revised project.

Currently the only unknown is NOAA. According to Muffy Walker, regulatory branch chief of the Army Corps of Engineers, the average time to fast-track an application is 77 days, which puts the project once again in jeopardy.

“We have been plagued by a turnover in staff at Corps. We have had four reps since I started with this,” Jones said. “And they are nit-picky. They reject drawings because they had color on them and dotted lines instead of solid.”

Kevin Long of NOSC said he has tried to follow up with the Corps but phone calls aren't returned. "It [the project] is stalled," he said.

Hopes dashed?

The newest application was not entered into the Corps database for two weeks, further pushing the envelope. But as of June 23, Jones received his first good news. Walker told him the application had been received and the project could move forward.

But then his hopes were dashed. The latest communiqué from Coffey that Jones received late on June 23 indicates that the application is still not complete. "I feel like they are stonewalling us," Jones said. "We have sent everything they requested. They have all the documents." He continued, "You'd think they would want to get such a small project off their desks."

The Bridgehaven project is not big in the Corps' overall scheme, but to the community it is of paramount importance. "They [Army Corps of Engineers] are dealing with port authorities – we are little and not a big priority," Jones lamented.

Although a Corps project manager, Koco Cronin, is assigned to the case, Jones said she is difficult to reach and frequently informs him that she doesn't have time to talk to him, causing further frustration.

If the project is not approved this time around, Jones said, "Our next move will be to contact our elected representative."

Harbor could close

If the entrance and marina are not dredged soon, Jones said the mouth would close completely, leaving the marina unusable. Even now, at low tide, the concrete docks sit on the mud, and many of the supporting brackets are twisted and need to be replaced. Boats can get in and out only at high tide – one sailboat can exit only at a plus-six tide. Up the channel, low tide sees docks high and dry on the mud and boats sitting on their bottoms, tipped like drunken sailors.

Despite the frustrations, Jones' tenacity, optimism and good humor remain intact. "It's been a struggle. I had no idea it would be so involved. I can't quit now."

(Freelancer writer Susan Colby is a two-year resident of Bridgehaven and owns one of the small boat docks.)