**Take Action: Protect the Lower Cape Fear River**

The Cape Fear River needs your help. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers invites public comments until July 22nd on a proposal by the State Port of Wilmington to deepen and widen Wilmington Harbor, a project that would have devastating impacts on the environment, wildlife, and community.

The Corps needs to hear from you, your friends and neighbors. Comments can be submitted on their website, [here](https://wilmington-harbor-usace-saw.hub.arcgis.com/pages/public), or by email to WilmingtonHarbor403@usace.army.mil.

This proposed project is massive. It would deepen the ship channel from 44 to 49 feet at the entrance and from 42 to 47 feet at the Port, widen some parts of the channel by 100-300 feet, and extend the entrance further offshore Bald Head and Oak Islands.

For more background, please read previous [comments the Federation has submitted to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers](https://www.nccoast.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/NCCF-Comments-on-WHNIP.pdf). They outline the project’s far-reaching environmental and community impacts, and how it would directly conflict with long-term conservation efforts within the Lower Cape Fear River watershed.

This will be the last opportunity to comment until the Draft Environmental Impact Statement is released in late 2025.

Please feel free to use talking points below when you write your comments.

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**Talking points to consider:**

* Deepening and widening the Federal ship channel will:
  + Negatively impact fish and wildlife habitats including threatened and endangered species and marine mammals;
  + Degrade water and air quality;
  + Increase flooding as more water can surge up the river during hurricanes and other extreme weather events;
  + Cause more saltwater to intrude further up the river, changing salinity and killing trees;
  + Increase wetland and shoreline erosion along the river and on adjacent oceanfront beaches. Long-term erosion trends along both Bald Head and Oak Islands have already been attributed to modifications to the ship channel. More deepening and widening of the channel, “softening” river bends, and extending the channel seaward would likely affect wave energy and sediment dynamics of the entire region. Larger wakes from bigger and more numerous ships will increase already significant shoreline erosion.
  + Result in more vessel strikes of turtles, mammals, and fish.
  + Degrade fishery and bird habitats associated with estuarine islands, shoals and mudflats that provide essential bird resting and foraging habitats.
* Natural attributes of the river that need protecting include:
  + Spectacular barrier islands, tidal creeks, and marsh ecosystems teaming with wildlife. Fish habitats, vital to our state’s economy, provide for a variety of species, including red drum, mackerel, cobia, bluefish, flounder, shrimp, ten shark species, and over fifty snapper-grouper species.
  + “Primary nursery areas” where post-larval and juvenile development of young finfish and crustaceans takes place, and the lower river is also designated as critical habitat for the federally endangered Atlantic sturgeon, which can live up to sixty years and travels upriver to spawn.
  + Turtles are commonly found near the Wilmington Port, and neighboring Caswell Beach and Bald Head Island are important nesting grounds for federally protected sea turtles, and within the river, sandy shorelines, shell rakes, and marsh edges are nesting sites for state-listed diamondback terrapins.
  + Birds throughout the year include over 330 species spotted in this region, from bald eagles to piping plovers. Thousands of shorebirds stop over during spring and fall migration and to overwinter. Over 25% of the State’s coastal waterbirds depend on the Lower Cape Fear River region for nesting.
  + Water quality will degrade because of contamination and sedimentation from dredge material disposal - which is impacted by PFAS and other industrial contaminants - and the activity of dredging itself can negatively impact water quality by stirring up sediments and toxic materials that may be found on the bottom of the river.
  + Harbor deepening can also reduce dissolved oxygen levels to unnaturally low levels on the river’s bottom, as well as alter the salinity profiles of the river.

**Learn more:**

The Army Corps of Engineers is hosting virtual public meetings to provide information about the project, project schedule and provide opportunities to interact with USACE team members. The virtual public meetings will focus on different topics and will provide an opportunity to interact and ask questions of their subject matter experts. Please see schedule, below (more information can be found on their website, [here](https://wilmington-harbor-usace-saw.hub.arcgis.com/)):

**June 24, 1pm to 3pm** - Session 1 - Plan Formulation, NEPA, Cultural Resources, Social Effects, Economics -  [Webex Link](https://usace1.webex.com/usace1/j.php?MTID=m1a0e69fa89ed61e6027d0250fcf0ccb7)

**June 26, 1pm to 3pm** - Session 2 - Ecological Resources -  [Webex Link](https://usace1.webex.com/usace1/j.php?MTID=mf2721a812e789c4a6fd6a70762017c2a)

**June 27, 1pm to 3pm** - Session 3 - Physical Resources - [Webex Link](https://usace1.webex.com/usace1/j.php?MTID=mb31f2bb1f8588d79cf12bd64c42fecf0)

**June 28, 1pm -to 3pm** - Session 4 - Beneficial Use of Dredged Material -   [Webex Link](https://usace1.webex.com/usace1/j.php?MTID=m5517f3eb963e8e1d9af25196f738a86f)

**Read more:**

* [Public can weigh in on Wilmington Harbor expansion plan | Coastal Review](https://coastalreview.org/2024/06/public-can-weigh-in-on-wilmington-harbor-expansion-plan/)
* [Former engineer sends warning to USACE on Wilmington harbor deepening | Port City Daily](https://portcitydaily.com/latest-news/2023/07/20/former-engineer-sends-warning-to-usace-on-wilmington-harbor-deepening/)
* [Environmental advocates raise concerns as feds evaluates Wilmington harbor dredging project | WHQR](https://www.whqr.org/local/2023-06-14/environmental-advocates-raise-concerns-as-feds-evaluates-wilmington-harbor-dredging-project)
* [Advocates cite risks of planned shipping channel project | Coastal Review](https://coastalreview.org/2023/06/advocates-cite-risks-of-planned-shipping-channel-project/)

***Please reach out to Kerri Allen, Coastal Advocate and Coastal Management Program Director with any questions or for more information at*** [***kerria@nccoast.org***](https://eml-pusa01.app.blackbaud.net/intv2/j/7C15D238-E4E7-4C9F-BCC1-7502AEA95934/r/7C15D238-E4E7-4C9F-BCC1-7502AEA95934_55c7b070-7ea6-4c8b-9762-773115437864/l/0E523E7B-922F-4396-91B5-67A167D04C16/c) ***/ 910.509.2838 ext. 203***