



United States Department of the Interior



IN REPLY REFER TO:

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Cape Lookout National Seashore
131 Charles Street
Harkers Island, North Carolina 28531

1.A.2.

February 14, 2014

The Honorable Walter B. Jones
United States House of Representatives
2333 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Jones:

This is in response to your February 5, 2014 letter, which expressed concerns about the draft Morehead City Harbor Dredged Material Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement (DMMP). The Wilmington District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) developed the draft DMMP, with the National Park Service (NPS) as a cooperating agency. This response will address those issues within the purview of the NPS; we understand that the Corps will be responding separately regarding its policies and considerations with respect to the DMMP.

Since the 1970's, the Corps has documented to NPS that dredging of the Morehead City Harbor channel has had detrimental effects on the natural sediment balance of the Beaufort Inlet Complex, which includes the ebb tide delta and beaches on both sides of the Inlet. For this reason, the Corps has always recommended that the beach-quality sediment dredged from the navigation channel be disposed of on Bogue Banks and Shackleford Banks. Previously the NPS has declined the disposal of sand on Shackleford Banks. So, to date, all beach disposal of dredged material from the navigation channel has been directed to Bogue Banks. Following review of the coastal analysis that was completed for the DMMP, the NPS requested that the Corps consider disposal of sand on Shackleford Banks as a potential alternative in the DMMP. The NPS has determined that this alternative represents a significant opportunity to address ongoing human-caused erosion issues at Shackleford Banks and protect vitally important natural and wilderness resources for future generations.

The NPS views the DMMP as an endeavor by the Corps to fulfill its obligations to maintain the Morehead City Harbor while minimizing the detrimental effects of dredging on the natural sediment balance of the Beaufort Inlet Complex. The NPS, in no way, considers this to be a beach nourishment plan. To minimize the adverse effects of dredging the navigation channel, the DMMP is attempting to keep as much beach-quality material in the system as possible, by balancing disposal on the adjacent beaches and nearshore placement areas. Because current

science presented by the Corps indicates that maintenance dredging of the Beaufort Inlet Complex has accelerated erosion of the shoreline on Shackleford Banks, the NPS asked for the alternative of placing sand on the beach at Shackleford be considered and analyzed in the DMMP. If the NPS did not ask for this option now, then it would not be available to the NPS for the life of the plan, which is 20 years. The current DMMP includes an option for placement of less than half of the dredged sand on the ocean beach at Shackleford on, at most, a three year cycle. The placement of sand would occur on a 3.65 mile section of beach which is approximately 1.5 miles from the western tip of Shackleford. Also, because of the limited amount of sand that would be placed on Shackleford, only a portion of the designated 3.65 miles would have sand placed on the beach during each 3-year sand placement cycle. The NPS would have to provide the Corps with a permit every time sand is placed on Shackleford. The permit would have conditions as to how and when sand would be placed on the island. The permit would include conditions to ensure the preservation of the Shackleford horses. In no way would the NPS allow equipment anywhere on the island other than on the ocean beach.

Although the Corps has provided information that indicates that maintenance dredging and current disposal practices of the Beaufort Inlet Complex have accelerated erosion of the shoreline on Shackleford Banks, the NPS has not yet developed criteria or metrics that would determine when or if sand would be placed on Shackleford. At this point in the planning effort for the DMMP, the NPS wants to be sure that option is analyzed and available. Currently, the NPS working with several scientists and other experts to ensure we are utilizing the best available science to inform our decision-making.

We appreciate your concern for the Shackleford horses. The proposed activities of placing sand on Shackleford would be limited to a relatively short period of time every three years, limited to a relatively small portion of the ocean beach, and the horses only use the beach for a movement corridor, not for grazing or drinking, the NPS does not believe that sand placement would impact the horses. Also as we mentioned above, these activities would be subject to a permit from the NPS which would have conditions to ensure preservation of the horses.

The Morehead City Harbor DMMP is an example of federal agencies sharing information, effort, and resources in a collaborative manner to strike a balance among all interested parties. By being included in the DMMP, the NPS will be able to consider mitigation of the impacts of erosion correlated to the dredging of the channel over the next 20 years.

The NPS understands the importance of this DMMP and appreciates your interest in this matter. All comments received during the public review period will be carefully considered during development of the final DMMP, which will also be circulated for public review. The NPS will strive to assist the Corps develop a final DMMP that considers the interests of all parties affected by maintenance of the Morehead City Harbor navigation project, while upholding our mandate to protect Shackleford Banks for the enjoyment of future generations. If you need additional information, please contact me at 252-728-2250, extension 3014.

Sincerely,



Patrick M. Kenney
Superintendent