



City of Biddeford, Maine
City Hall – 205 Main Street
Biddeford, Maine 04005



City of Saco, Maine
City Hall – 300 Main Street
Saco, Maine 04072

May 1, 2015

Mr. Edward G. O'Donnell, Chief, Navigation Section
Mr. Craig Martin, Project Manager/Physical Scientist
New England District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
696 Virginia Road
Concord. MA 01742

Dear Messrs. O'Donnell and Martin,

As a follow up to our meeting and discussion on Friday, February 27th at the Department of Transportation in Augusta, Maine, we are writing on behalf of the cities of Biddeford and Saco to seek your assistance in securing Federal funding in the 2017 budget for maintenance dredging of the Federal Navigation Project in the Saco River. This project is critically important to our cities, residents, commercial businesses, a private university, recreational boaters and our regional tourism industry.

Background Information

The existing Federal Navigation Project (FNP) in the Saco River consists of an 8 foot deep channel extending approximately 4 miles upstream from Saco Bay to a 6 to 8 foot deep maneuvering basin at Factory Island. There are also three 6 foot deep federal anchorage areas near the mouth of the river totaling 13.5 acres that are utilized by a commercial fishing fleet of 40+ vessels. The 8 foot depth was authorized in 1928. The last dredging activities by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) occurred in 1994 when 46,378 cubic yards of sand was removed from the downstream portions of the channel and anchorages. Since that time the project has not received any maintenance by USACE, leading to Mean Low Low Water depths of 0.5 to 4 feet at many locations. By USACE estimates, approximately 140,000 cubic yards of material needs to be dredged to restore the FNP to its authorized depth of 8 feet. This project is estimated to cost USACE \$3.2 Million.

Working together, the cities of Biddeford and Saco, the USACE, and local marine interests have completed testing, prepared dredge material disposal analysis, and undertaken all preparatory tasks necessary in anticipation of a maintenance dredge project to be commissioned by USACE when construction funds are available. The project was submitted in the FY 2011 appropriation request but did not get final approval. Dredging work within the next year is absolutely critical to Biddeford and Saco and our local and regional economy. Marine related businesses and economic development opportunities have already been lost due to siltation conditions in the FNP. We must reverse this trend immediately and cannot do so without the direct assistance of the USACE.

Commercial Transportation Impacts

The Saco River FNP was once utilized to transport raw materials to the textile mills located in downtown Biddeford and Saco and ship finished goods to customers all over the world. Commercial transportation ceased in 2008 when Valmet (formerly Metso Paper USA) shipped approximately 120 tons of paper machinery to a domestic customer. The Saco River was the first leg in this \$64 million machinery project that employed 83 workers at Valmet. The project also provided work to Rumery's Boat Yard during one of the worst recessions in US history, providing much needed work to 4 fulltime workers and revenues that, at the time, were critical to keeping the yard's doors open as it expanded its commercial and recreational services and honed its unique specialty in deep keel sailboats. Shoaling in the FNP caused the commercial transportation service company to become ineligible for commercial insurance by Lloyd's of London and literally ground our commercial transportation services to a halt in 2008. Valmet now ships its paper machinery via the Port of Portland which is more costly. Portland is also located approximately 15 miles north of Biddeford. The loss of commercial transportation services equates to approximately \$100,000 in annual revenues and contributed to the loss of countless fulltime positions in the marine trades industry and local manufacturing community.

Not only are local businesses experiencing the negative effects of the loss of commercial transportation services, commercial and recreational businesses are suffering due to significant shoaling in the FNP. With current depths at 0.5 to 4 feet, boaters report several hard and soft groundings each year which has contributed to the loss of 10 full time positions and the loss of over \$1 Million in repair, maintenance and storage revenues at Rumery's Boat Yard alone in the last 5 years. Marston's Marina and Camp Ellis have lost commercial fishing boats due to the lack of water in the FNP. Commercial businesses report the loss of revenues as shoaling in the FNP is feeding a negative perception by mariners that the Saco River, depending on the tides, is not safe and/or is inconvenient for deep keel commercial and recreational vessels. Additionally, at the Federal anchorage at Hills Beach and Camp Ellis, we've lost over 17 spots of deep keel anchorage on the Biddeford side and 12-14 spots on the Saco side. Biddeford's largest commercial dragger now docks in Portland for convenience and ready access to marine services. Once lost, both commercial and recreational business can take years and hundreds of thousands of dollars in marketing and communications spending to rebuild.

Economic Impacts

Besides the major commercial transportation impacts, commercial activity on the Saco River contributes more than \$53 Million in economic impact to our communities each year. The Saco River is home to more than 40 commercial fishing vessels. The Camp Ellis fish pier and several local marinas are used by the commercial fishing fleet and more than 38 tuna fishing boats, 20 charter and sport fishing boats, a parasailing operation, day sailing operations, a kayak rental company and local fire and rescue boats that serve Biddeford, Saco and Old Orchard Beach. The river supports more than 450 full time jobs. The Saco River and FNP support one of the State's largest recreational boating and fishing populations and attracts thousands of visitors to our communities each year.

In addition, the University of New England (UNE) and its Marine Science Center is located on more than 4,000 feet of frontage along the Saco River. UNE's total economic impact on the state of Maine was \$738 Million in 2013. UNE attracts over 15,000 visitors each year who generate \$11.5 million in sales for local businesses. The University is home to a rapidly expanding Marine Science Center of Excellence which is the recent recipient of approximately \$4 Million in Federal grants from the National Science Foundation and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Current Federal grants are tied to over \$27 Million in partnership programs with other academic and research institutions across Maine. The Marine Science Center currently hosts 217 students who generate more than \$5.8 Million in tuition each year and contribute approximately \$2.9 Million in local economic impact.

Current Expansion Plans and Local Jobs in Jeopardy

The development of a new multimillion dollar condominium and marina complex at the head of the falls in Saco was halted in 2010 when due diligence revealed that the development of a marina reliant on deep water draft was too risky for investment without regularly scheduled maintenance activity to keep the mooring field and FNP open to larger boats. Shoaling in the FNP is currently jeopardizing a \$250,000 expansion plan by Rumery's to create 28 new slips for transient boaters seeking repair and maintenance services, that are seeking safe harbor in storms. UNE's Marine Science Center has plans to acquire a new 50' research vessel and build a new pier to support new academic programming at an estimated cost of \$3 Million. The loss of these projects could cost our cities millions in positive economic impact in terms of net new revenues, net new jobs, and access to Federal research and development funding grants.

The Saco River is also a unique component of our community's developing Multimodal Transportation Corridor Plan, providing both commercial and recreational boaters with access to Biddeford and Saco's downtown districts via water. Water transportation to the head of the falls offers quick access to our downtown districts and provides a unique experience and perspective for visitors who are new to our cities or are seeking to access our downtown districts via a more convenient means of transportation.

Despite the current challenges of safely navigating the Saco River and the loss of commercial transportation activities, both Biddeford and Saco are experiencing significant resurgence and growth in our downtown districts. In early 2015, Biddeford announced more than \$65 Million in new development projects within the Mill District which includes a new 80 room, high-end boutique hotel, several new restaurants, and the development of new residential housing units. Saco announced more than \$50 million in new development projects including the rehabilitation of a mill into new residential housing and office space. Biddeford and Saco intend to market the Saco River and beach communities as tourist destinations and to encourage the use of water taxi and ferry services as a means to access our respective downtown and mill districts while experiencing the unique scenery of the Saco River Estuary.

Request for USACE Assistance

In closing, we respectfully request the USACE to include the estimated \$3.2 Million Saco River FNP maintenance dredging project in the 2017 budget request. The long term sustainability of current economic impact statistics, current employment figures, new marketing initiatives, commercial development projects, the expansion of the Marine Science Center at UNE, new federal grant applications to support research and development initiatives, job growth and retention in several industry sectors, and our ability to make commercial transportation available to local manufacturers is highly dependent upon the USACE's immediate maintenance dredging of the FNP. This project is critical to supporting economic development initiatives and generating long term sustainability of our local marine and marine related industries.

Thank you for your consideration of our request for assistance. If you have any questions about this importance of this project or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

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