



Fast Facts

Dredging the harbor to 48 feet would result in the loss of 10 times as much freshwater wetland as dredging to 45 feet, even with mitigation, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Dredging to 48 feet is projected to cost \$500 million. Georgia taxpayers will have to pay 35% of dredging costs up to 45 feet and 50% of dredging costs from 45 to 48 feet.

One half of freshwater wetlands in the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge have been destroyed by past deepening of the Savannah harbor and channel, according to the U.S. FWS.

Due to past harbor development, production of striped bass eggs in the Savannah River estuary has declined by about 95 percent since 1977. Federal and state natural resource agencies are working to restore this fishery.

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Justify the Need for Savannah Harbor Deepening

What's at Stake?

The proposal to dredge the 30-mile-long Port of Savannah channel from 42 to 48 feet in depth is extremely controversial. To reach a responsible position on the harbor project, other relevant issues must be considered concurrently such as:

- inter-basin transfers to Atlanta and other cities;
- doubling of the water demands of the Vogtle Nuclear site;
- construction of the Jasper Port;
- current declines in world shipping; and
- increased residential and industrial water demands.

Harbor deepening must not be approved until the issues of economic development, water management, shipping congestion and public risk have all been addressed comprehensively in good faith. The orderly, scientific, and competent management of the Savannah River Basin is at stake. Consequently, the river's water quality and quantity, the health of the basin's ecosystems, and the safety and welfare of the population living in and dependent upon the Savannah River Basin hang in this balance.

Challenges

Some interests may advocate funding the harbor deepening without comprehensive analysis being completed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers or reviewed by the public. Such 'blind faith' support of major projects is not only environmentally reckless, but it's fiscally irresponsible. At a time when public funds must be spent most judiciously, taxpayers cannot afford such risky speculative ventures.

The Corps was scheduled to release a draft environmental impact statement in October 2008, but meeting minutes show that Corps economists disagreed so boisterously over engineering, environment and economics that an internal review of the document was ordered before public release, which could take 12 months.

Next Steps

The Georgia Legislature must ensure that no taxpayer dollars are allocated for dredging and no major new projects in the Savannah River Basin are granted state permits until exhaustive environmental and economic analyses have been completed and reviewed.