



Community Resources Development

TIMELY

INFORMATION

ALABAMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE/AUBURN UNIVERSITY/AUBURN, ALABAMA

MOBILE BAY AND MISSISSIPPI SOUND  
PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION WORKSHOPS

## SUMMARY REPORT

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## SUMMARY

The problems facing the Mobile Bay and Mississippi Sound region as it develops into a major industrial and commercial center are both complex and stimulating. Maintenance of the quality of life and environment, a prime factor in the attraction of both individuals and industry to the area, is a major concern of many local residents. However, development of the area's resources in a manner that optimizes environmental, economic, and social conditions is not easily accomplished. Division of limited resources among more and wider ranging interests makes the resulting conflicts frequent and intense. Dredging and dredge spoil disposal methods are at the core of many area development plans and environmental conflicts.

The U. S. Corps of Engineers has initiated a comprehensive regional study of Mobile Bay and Mississippi Sound to determine whether the present and proposed dredge material disposal methods for maintenance and construction of channels and other Corps projects should be modified in the interest of economic efficiency and environmental quality. The first stage in the development of this plan is the identification of water resource problems within the study area.

To accomplish the problem identification phase and to involve the public at the earliest possible stage, a series of workshops for leaders from various interest groups with a particular knowledge and concern about Mobile Bay and Mississippi Sound was held. These leaders were divided into seven different groups based on their primary area of interest. The groups were: (1) marine transportation, (2) recreation interest, (3) seafood industry, (4) state and federal agencies, (5) academic/research interest, (6) environmental/civic groups, and (7) elected officials. The role of the Alabama Sea Grant Advisory Service was to identify leaders and to coordinate and conduct these workshops.

A modified nominal grouping technique was used for each workshop. Following a general orientation on the purpose of the study and the method to be used to identify and assign priorities to problems, each participant was then asked to make a list of concerns associated with water resources in the study area. Members of each group were encouraged to consider a wide range of problems and not to limit themselves only to dredging and spoil disposal. They were also encouraged to describe their concerns as specifically as possible. The opportunity to verbally express a problem was then passed to each member of the group and this procedure continued until all perceived problems had been identified. All the subjects mentioned were listed, reviewed, and discussed to clarify the concern. Participants were then asked to



list the five most important problems in descending order of priority. Points were assigned accordingly: 5 for first priority, 4 for the second, etc. The five items with the highest numerical total were considered the consensus priority listing for the group.

Each workshop produced a lengthy list of subjects of concern. Many of these were specific and often beyond the scope of this particular study and the operations of the Corps of Engineers; however, dredging and the disposal of material may indirectly influence the alternatives and projects considered in the future. The concerns of various groups often had a common direction, particularly in assigning priorities. Many groups were concerned about similar topics and tended to place higher priorities on problems expressed in general terms than they gave to more specific statements of concern.

The impact of dredging and dredge spoil disposal activities on water quality, natural biological processes, and marine life was an item of concern for almost all workshop participants. Although the statement of the problems varied between workshop groups, many similarities in this general category were observed. Specific areas such as wetlands and oyster reefs were considered as particularly vulnerable and their preservation was a high priority item for certain groups. Change in water circulation patterns, effects of large sediment loads and the resultant siltation of critical biological and recreational areas were concerns identified in several workshops.

Development of marine transportation facilities and channels was a subject of particular interest to both elected officials and marine transportation leaders. This is not surprising because much of the anticipated growth of the area is closely tied to marine transportation. Increased employment and other benefits of economic development are certainly important to elected officials, but they were also concerned about the impacts of development on environmental quality. The importance of increasing access to the Bay and Sound was also discussed at the officials' workshop.

Maintenance of smaller channels, and the development of additional facilities for small vessels were accorded high priority by three groups: elected officials, recreation interests, and the seafood industry.

The close relationship that exists between the seafood industry and coastal recreation interests is not often acknowledged; however, it was quite evident in the subjects of concern and ordering of priorities of the two groups. Change in circulation patterns, siltation of biologically critical areas, and the protection of the seafood resources were identified as items of high priority by the consensus of both groups. The highest priority concern of the recreation leaders was the protection of the seafood industry in the region.

The shell dredge spoiling into the Bay was the top priority problem identified by the seafood industry leaders. Shell dredging has been conducted in Mobile Bay for approximately 30 years and has been surrounded by controversy since its inception. Other groups, including elected officials, also listed this item as a subject of concern.

Consideration of the use of dredge spoil as a resource was a positive element of the workshop proceedings. Each group identified beneficial uses of the material such as: beach nourishment, creation of new marshes, construction of protective islands, establishment of new oyster beds, re-establishment of areas of Petit Bois Island, and construction of port and marina facilities.

The development of alternative techniques for dredging and dredge spoil disposal was mentioned by various groups. Ocean disposal was the most frequently discussed technique, but seafood industry leaders were concerned about the effects of this disposal method on productive Gulf shrimping areas. The transportation industry apparently felt that whatever the solution, it must be found quickly.

The economic and social impacts of the expansion, or as suggested in the academic/research session, the impacts of not expanding dredging activities held the interest of many of the participants. The positive aspects of an expanded level of dredging activity must be considered in comparison to the economic costs of dredging and disposal in addition to the adverse impacts that may accrue to existing uses of the study area. Social consequences due to the displacement of individuals from traditional industries also constitute an important consideration in this type of decision.

Long-range planning for the utilization of land and water resources was a need identified by both agency representatives and environmental/civic leaders. However, such planning requires time and many groups who must obtain permits for certain activities are presently frustrated by the time required for the decision-making process. Elected officials suggested that a streamlined process utilizing a one-step permitting system might help to alleviate this problem.

One final problem that surfaced while the workshop sessions were being conducted must be noted. Many government agencies seeking public input suffer from a lack of credibility with the public, primarily because of a suspicion that agencies do not seriously consider public input in their program planning process. This feeling was particularly evident and clearly expressed by the seafood industry leaders, but was present in varying degrees in the other groups participating in this study. The existence and serious nature of this problem should be a concern of all agency personnel.

The Alabama Sea Grant Advisory Service believes that although a large number of problems and concerns have been identified by the group leaders who participated in these workshop sessions, the list is not yet complete. We do feel that these meetings were quite productive, not only in providing a more comprehensive information base for the Corps' study of Mobile Bay and Mississippi Sound, but also in helping to develop an atmosphere conducive to free and open exchange of ideas, concerns, and philosophy between the Corps and the public it serves.



HIGHEST PRIORITY PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED BY EACH GROUP

Marine Transportation Interest Workshop (May 9, 1978)

1. Deepest possible coastal channel
2. Existing environmental restrictions and the rights of private property owners as they relate to spoil disposal
3. Find a solution to handling dredge material. Present and future projects
4. Deepest possible channel to Mobile
- \*\*5. Economic impact of disposal of dredge material, especially inflationary impacts
- \*\*5. Providing for long-term growth for: dock space, barge fleet-ing area, turning basins and anchorages

Recreation Interest Workshop (May 10, 1978)

1. Protection of seafood industry (shrimp & oyster production areas)
2. Shifting of spoil material outside spoil area
3. Silting of Fairhope Channel, Dog River, Fowl River and other small channels
4. Lack of adequate public access in Mobile Bay
5. Spoil area effect on water currents and area resources

Seafood Interest Workshop (May 11, 1978)

- \*\*1. Why is the material (shell) dredge allowed to spoil in Mobile Bay?
- \*\*2. Suspicion of lack of seriousness of Corps of Engineers
- \*\*3. Design flow such that up-river pollutants will go out of the Bay area
4. Better coordination between governmental and private interest in protecting fishing industry
5. Need for a deepwater channel between Dauphin Island and Petit Bois Island

\*\* Equal Priority

Agency Representatives Workshop (May 11, 1978)

1. Where to place the material environmentally and most cost efficiently. Consider impacts at off-shore sites
2. Maintaining water quality from dredging and port development and prevent degradation
3. Development of long-range land and water use planning
4. Effect of dredging on water quality-toxic pollutants. Bacterial effects on shellfish
5. Alteration of circulation patterns

Academic/Research Interest Workshop (May 12, 1978)

1. Use of dredged material as a resource
- \*\* 2. Impact on recreation and seafood industries (dredge & disposal)
- \*\* 3. Economic and social impact of non-expansion of dredging
4. Dredge spoil disposal and alternatives to dredging
5. Sediment types and predictive capabilities for determining mechanisms of sediment transport

Environmental/Civic Interest Workshop (June 15, 1978)

1. Preservation of the quality of the wetlands
2. Development of long-range land use plans which show the impact land uses have on the Bay
3. Storm water run-off from urban and rural areas into the Bay, and correction of existing problems
4. Need to preserve open space areas (Delta, Dauphin Island, marshes)
5. Need for a Delta and Bay study of effects of planned developments (present and future projects)

Elected Officials Workshop (June 22, 1978)

1. Impacts of improvements at State Docks
2. Development of deep channels to industrial sites in Baldwin County
- \*\* 3. Lack of a one-step permitting process
- \*\* 4. Use of spoil material to create protective islands compatible with existing uses
- \*\* 5. Need for a Mobile city marina

\*\* Equal priority