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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3303

January 21, 2014

The Honorable Jo-Ellen Darcy
Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works)
Department of Defense
108 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0108

Lieutenant General Thomas P. Bostick
Commanding General & Chief of Engineers
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
441 G St., NW
Washington, DC 20314-1000

Dear Assistant Secretary Darcy and Lieutenant General Bostick:

I am writing to you once again about the critical situation at Oregon Inlet (Manteo – Shallowbag Bay). The chronically poor navigation conditions discussed in your June, 2014 meeting with Dare County leaders and staff members for myself, Governor Pat McCrory, and Senator Kay Hagan, have now reached crisis levels. While the channel has an authorized depth of 14 feet, the latest Army Corps of Engineers survey of the inlet shows the portion of the channel just east of the Bonner Bridge at less than three feet. Commercial vessels have virtually stopped using the channel, and use by other vessels has declined dramatically. As a result, the local economy is suffering considerably.

The President's Fiscal Year 2015 budget request only included \$800,000 for the project. From that total, the amount allotted for dredging has already been spent and no funds remain.

To allow the Corps to address situations such as these, Congress added to the Fiscal Year 2015 appropriations bill several unallocated pots of money for different project categories. For example, \$45 million was added for "Navigation Maintenance," and \$42.5 million was added for "Small, Remote, or Subsistence Navigation." Oregon Inlet should be eligible for funding from either of these pots.

Congress also directed the Corps to consider several criteria when deciding which projects to fund from these pots. As outlined below, Oregon Inlet should rank highly based on these criteria.

- a) **Ability to complete ongoing work maintaining authorized depths and widths of harbors and shipping channels** – For decades the federal government has annually funded, and the Corps has regularly dredged, Oregon Inlet. However, conditions have deteriorated in recent years and the channel has rarely been cleared to its authorized depth and width of 14' x 400'. Supplemental FY15 funds could return the channel to its authorized dimensions. Once that work is complete, the state of North Carolina and the County of Dare are coming together on a work plan to fund ongoing pro-active maintenance dredging using their own funds.
- b) **Ability to address critical maintenance backlog** – To call the maintenance situation at Oregon Inlet critical is an understatement. Over the past decade, regular federal maintenance has incrementally declined. As a result, inlet conditions are now at

crisis levels as the main channel is all but impassable for most vessels. Supplemental FY15 funds would allow this backlog to be addressed.

- c) **Presence of U.S. Coast Guard** – Oregon Inlet is a port of safe haven and is home to USCG Station Oregon Inlet. The nearest safe haven ports are approximately 100 miles to the north, and 120 miles to the south. Response time for USCG Oregon Inlet has already been increased because of shoaling conditions. In fact, I understand that a small shallow draft survey boat must run the area ahead of the 47' Coast Guard boat in order to check depths and to prevent groundings. Additionally, as the shoaling continues its migration in a southwesterly direction, vessels are required to use narrower spans under the Bonner Bridge even farther to the south of the main channel. Transiting through these spans is not only incredibly dangerous, but height limitations will ultimately make it impossible for many vessels to transit under the bridge, including the Coast Guard's 47' offshore response vessel.
- d) **Extent to Which the Work Will Enhance Economic Development** – According to a recent economic study, even in 2013 when the channel was significantly shoaled in for much of the year, Oregon Inlet supported 4,384 jobs and provided \$548 million in annual economic impacts. If the channel were maintained to its full authorized dimensions, it is estimated that the inlet would support 5,397 jobs (+ 1,049) and \$693 million in annual economic impact (+\$147 million).
- e) **Extent to Which the Work Will Promote Job Growth** – See explanation d) above.
- f) **Number of Jobs Created Directly By the Funded Activity** – See explanation d) above.
- g) **Ability to Obligate the Funds Allocated Within the Fiscal Year** – As mentioned previously, federal funds allocated to the inlet from the president's fiscal year 2015 budget have all been spent. Given the need, there is no doubt that additional federal funds could be obligated to the inlet – and spent – this fiscal year.
- h) **Ability to Complete the Project** – Taking the project to its full authorized depth this fiscal year would be contingent on dredge availability, bids received, environmental windows and other factors, but with sufficient supplemental funding this could be achieved.
- i) **Risk of Imminent Failure or Closure of the Facility** – As mentioned previously, significant portions of the channel are now less than three feet deep, and the channel is, for all intents and purposes, closed to most traffic already.

As you can see, Oregon Inlet meets the criteria laid out by Congress very well. It is exactly the type of project that Congress had in mind when it provided the Corps with these additional pots of fiscal year 2015 funding, and I strongly urge you to give it all due consideration. If I can answer any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me. I look forward to hearing your response. And as always, thank you for your service.

Sincerely,



Walter B. Jones
Member of Congress