



# Cape Fear Firebird

*The Light of Save the Cape*

May 31, 2016

*You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time,  
but you cannot fool all the people all the time.*

~ Abraham Lincoln

## ***The Sting***

Despite Honest Abe's observation, the North Carolina State Ports Authority has been able to fool the elected and appointed officials of Our State consistently. And still does. Here are some examples of the Ports' pilfering of the public purse:

- In 2005, the Ports Authority obtained Council of State approval to spend \$30 million for a 600-acre property near Southport that was appraised by the County for \$4.9 million. The Ports Authority financed the full price with bonds, which remain as debt to this day. As does debt for \$20 million for plans for a deepwater port on the site, where the water is two feet deep.
- In 2007, the Ports Authority purchased four container cranes for the Port at Wilmington for \$32 million. The General Assembly appropriated half, \$16 million, in two instalments. But the Ports Authority did not use that money for the cranes. Instead, they financed the full cost of \$32 million with a 15-year lease. The final payment of \$23 million falls due in 2023.
- In 2015, at Senator Rabon's behest, the General Assembly put in the budget an annual subsidy of \$35 million for the State Ports. The Ports Authority had sold Bill and his colleagues on a plan for improvements at the Port of Wilmington for a new generation of much larger Asian container ships. But did not disclose that those ships cannot navigate the river to the port.

What! \$35 million per year for a plan that cannot succeed? Well, yes. Here are the facts:

The channel in the Cape Fear River is 42 feet deep, designed to accommodate ships drawing up to 38 feet. However, in practice, the largest vessels, Asian container ships of 4500 TEU (twenty-foot equivalent units) drawing more than 36 feet must await a favorable tide. The problem is an S-turn at Battery Island, near the mouth of the river, that does not comply with Corps of Engineers specifications for channel turns, and cannot be enlarged to so comply within the banks of the river.

Those 4500 TEU container ships will not call after June, 2016. The Asian shipping lines are changing to larger ships, 6500 TEU and more, to take advantage of the new locks in the Panama Canal. These ships have a design draft of 45 to 49 feet. It is quite clear that if such a ship is carrying a cargo heavier than ping-pong balls, it cannot navigate the Cape Fear River. The Ports Authority must know that. If they don't, they are negligent. Yet the Ports Authority asks for more funds to spend on more cranes and other improvements for those ships. They have already received \$35 million and spent most of it to enlarge the turning basin at Wilmington for ships that cannot get there.

The budget bill now on the floor again has \$35 million for the Ports. We are being swindled.