



# Cape Fear Firebird

*The Light of Save the Cape*

December 29, 2015

*Open country rising in height above the sandy shore with many fair fields and plains, full of mighty great woods, some very thick, and some thin, replenished with diverse sorts of trees, as pleasant and delectable to behold, as is possible to imagine.*

~ Giovanni da Verrazano (1524)

## ***The Sum of All Fears***

In 1761, a four-day storm opened an inlet into the Cape Fear River about halfway between Wilmington and Bald Head. The “New Inlet” was deep enough for shallow-draft vessels, and was used for access to Wilmington by shallow-draft blockade runners during the Civil War. However, shoaling from New Inlet substantially reduced the depth of the main channel to the river mouth. From 1870 to 1891, the Corps of Engineers constructed a rock wall to restore the natural flow by blocking New Inlet. The wall was extended southward to prevent other breaches.

Comes now 2015, and State Senators Bill Rabon, Michael Lee, and Harry Brown persuaded the General Assembly to initiate a plan to remove the southern portion of that rock wall to facilitate opening of another inlet to the sea. Why? And why would the new inlet be south of the old inlet? That’s directly across river from the 600-acre site the State Ports Authority purchased for a massive container port, and which it now holds for a “new strategic seaport.” Here are possible reasons:

- A. The obvious: shortening the route from Wilmington to the sea. This would avoid the turn at Battery Island and make possible a wider and deeper channel suitable for much larger container ships. But then why would they not be removing rocks to reopen the original New Inlet farther north?
- B. Less obvious: making the 600-acre Southport site available for these uses:
  - 1. support for offshore oil exploration and drilling;
  - 2. support for offshore windmill farms;
  - 3. liquified natural gas export (probably the least likely);
  - 4. revival of the \$4.4 billion container megaport plan.

These projects have two things in common: all would desecrate our lovely Cape Fear; and none make economic sense. None have had the benefit of return-on-investment analysis. None have had the benefit of cost/benefit analysis. Yet State money, our money, is being used to chase these bureaucratic dreams. The State Ports Authority, learning nothing from the waste of \$50 million on the Southport megaport, is using \$70 million in new State funds Bill Rabon arranged to begin a project to accommodate container ships at Wilmington that could not get up the river to the port unless we spend about half a billion dollars for dredging.