



Cape Fear Firebird

The Light of Save the Cape

March 2, 2012

Ask not what North Carolina can do for its ports; ask only what the ports can do for North Carolina.
-Save the Cape

The Perpetual Study Machine

On February 15, the North Carolina Department of Transportation team conducting the Maritime Strategy Study posted a draft report showing the results obtained so far in this \$2 million project. www.ncmaritimestudy.com. Big file, long, tedious document. What's in it?

For a student of the topic of North Carolina ports, disappointment: The report adds little to the mass of material already developed by the State Port Authority's consultants and the US Army Corps of Engineers. Although those materials have been widely unread, they are available for one and all at www.savethecape.org/stcwp1/library. The most striking contrasts between the new study and the prior data bank are in the cost estimates—some costs, such as dredging, are shown in the new study at about one-third of the consensus of the earlier work.

For the taxpayer, distress: Two million dollars added to the seven million already spent on that mass of unread material. And, it seems quite evident, leading to the spending of many more millions for further study. Adding to even more millions sunk in port dreams.

For the bureaucrat, contentment: The study contains a delicious smorgasbord of material that can be selected and arranged to suit whatever need comes to mind, without any limitation imposed by firm conclusions. The mechanism to roll the issue along without really doing anything.

For the consultants preparing the study, satisfaction. Page after page of enticing issues requiring more million-dollar studies. The stuff of which careers are made.

For the Cape, there is fear: Plans to dredge the channel nine feet deeper and a hundred feet wider, destroying more marine habitat, stripping the top off of the aquifer, and further destabilizing the beaches at the mouth of the river. Air pollution, water pollution, a mess of badness.

For the community, a ray of hope: The proposals for massive container terminals, whether at Wilmington, Belville (yes, Belville), or Southport are so preposterous in their projections and so stupendous in their cost (\$3+ billion for Wilmington, \$6+ billion for Southport) that they must fail, sooner or later. We hope it is sooner.

For the ports, some promise of prosperity: The study identifies more modest projects with favorable benefit/cost ratios that would benefit North Carolina's industries. Those projects, to handle more efficiently grain, wood pellets and other wood projects, refrigerated cargo, roll-on, roll-off cargo, and oversize cargo, all yield higher returns on much lower investments than the container megaterminals. Best of all, those projects do not require dredging to succeed.